Palestine: A Short History

From the Roots of Zionism to Today

Muhammed Ilhami

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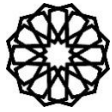
From Zionism to the Present



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Introduction

Of all the books I've authored, I consider this study to be the most taxing and demanding. From the outset, I knew it would be a challenging task, but as I delved deeper, I found it to be even more daunting than I had initially thought. On several occasions, I even considered stopping and postponing it but quickly dismissed the thought as a devilish temptation. How many papers have absorbed my time and effort, only to be shelved, waiting for the 'right time' to finish them? Yet as time goes by, free time diminishes, responsibilities increase, and both energy and health decline. There is no decision worse for a writer than to defer a task; postponed work is seldom completed.

I became aware of the issue of Palestine from an early age, and it has been a deep concern of mine through every stage of my life. This is where I first began to understand the profound complexity and sensitivity of this issue that makes summarizing it into a book a daunting endeavor. Originally, this study was meant to be written later, after reaching the modern and contemporary periods in the *Compendium of Islamic History* project. However, the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa crisis (*Ṭūfān al-Aqṣā*) necessitated that it be addressed sooner, as it has now become the pressing issue of our time.

To reiterate, the *Compendium of Islamic History* series is not intended to appeal to historians or academic researchers but rather to those engaged in the mission of this faith. The aim is to provide them with a concise overview to grasp the significant themes, lessons, and insights of Islamic history. This objective directly influences the writing style, approach, and tone I adopted here, requiring it to be succinct. Achieving such brevity is the greatest challenge in crafting this study, given the task of condensing a vast and eventful history filled with rich details and countless sources.

Most leaders associated with this issue have documented their experiences in memoirs and diaries, or these records were compiled posthumously. This collection spans Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims, as well as Zionists, the British, and Americans. Almost every significant figure related to this topic has been the focus of at least one study. Additionally, historians and researchers have invested substantial effort into analyzing and addressing the issue. Their numbers, and their publications, are countless. This is in addition to the extensive archives of documents and newspapers that span more than a century.

There is no issue, event, or figure within this topic without a range of conflicting and divergent opinions. Often, these perspectives are less than fully sincere, as understanding writers' motivations and their position within the political landscape is essential. Even those who tried to be honest were not always able to express all they knew, out of consideration for internal and external sensitivities. Some remained silent, while others hinted—hints that only an informed contemporary could grasp. For a reader distanced by time, understanding these subtleties is even more difficult. Given all of this, what could be more challenging than extracting a summary of this history from such a vast, turbulent sea?

I recognize that, no matter how much effort I put into a study like this, much will inevitably be left out. Mistakes, too, will slip in despite my utmost efforts to avoid them. Circumstances have forced me to conclude this study with a list of sources far longer than those I managed to review. I tried my utmost—though it is modest—to follow, understand, and summarize this history. Even though I've been engaged with this issue from a young age, reading, writing, and staying informed, every new source shocked and devastated me further. The scale of betrayal is broader than you can imagine, and the tragedy more horrifying. This makes the effort required to free our nation and Palestine far greater than anticipated.

I have worked to provide a balanced account of history, addressing the religious, political, and social dimensions that are intricately connected to the issue. I concluded the narrative with key lessons and insights from this history. For those who may not have the time or patience to read the entire story, they can proceed directly to these summaries, which should be sufficient, God willing.

There is no need to immerse the reader in a maze of methodological and scientific details, as this study is intended to be concise, and not unnecessarily long. Therefore, I'll briefly outline the study's approach by noting that readers can focus on the main text without delving into the footnotes, which are mainly for those who want to explore further or check information from its source. This approach helps the reader maintain the flow of the narrative without the distraction of excessive footnotes. Though I have avoided overusing footnotes, I realize that certain details may surprise readers, making references essential. Most of these sources are primary, particularly eyewitness memoirs. While I haven't detailed each individual's involvement or connection to the topic, the context is understandable for those familiar with these figures or inclined to verify.[1]

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[1] To illustrate my point, let me provide an example. I referenced Mahmoud Al-Sabbagh's book, *The Truth About the Special Organization and Its Role in the Muslim Brotherhood's Call*, to address specific issues. At first glance, the reader might wonder who Mahmoud Al-Sabbagh is and what relevance he has to a discussion about Abdel Qader Al-Husseini and Amin Al-Husseini. This curiosity likely arises from a lack of knowledge about Al-Sabbagh's background—he served as the liaison officer between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Arab Higher Committee. He was also a close friend and assistant to Abdel Qader Al-Husseini, overseeing armament efforts and leading the first Brotherhood volunteer unit sent to Palestine. Explaining all of this in detail would go beyond the scope of the main text or its footnotes. Similarly, I cited Malika Oufkir's book, which might initially surprise readers since it recounts the story of a Moroccan woman's imprisonment. However, my reference pertains to the relationship between Jews and the Moroccan regime. In her book, Oufkir includes lesser-known details about her father, General Mohamed Oufkir, who was the second-most powerful figure in the Moroccan regime at the time. Such insights, though tangential to the primary narrative, provide valuable context.

I was also unable to clarify why I identified this particular account and preferred it over others, as such an explanation would be too lengthy and unsuitable for a summary. However, I may occasionally make a brief note in the footnote on this matter. If a source is not primary or an eyewitness memoir, it is generally a study by a leading historian who has produced substantial and high-quality research, either on the history of the issue in general or specifically on the topic under examination. These historians often rely on archival documents that are either inaccessible or difficult to obtain. I have completely avoided any sources that might be considered emotional or not academically reliable.

Anyone who reflects on the footnotes and their arrangement will understand that I have considered various technical, academic, and historical factors that cannot be fully explained here. For example, when discussing the Ottoman period, I may reference the words of a nationalist Arab leader rather than Islamic figures, or I might cite someone whose testimony is irrefutable regarding a particular event, adhering to the principle of a direct eyewitness. In addressing famous events, I typically refrain from citing the source unless it involves a tragedy or massacre. In such cases, I prefer to direct the reader to a memoir rather than a report, as memoirs capture a more personal, emotional aspect compared to the dry statistics found in reports. If the reader wishes to explore further, it is better to consult a source that conveys the event's emotional weight and tragedy, rather than a cold, systematic account.

I have extensively used footnotes and references, which I reiterate are not primarily meant for the general readers of this study, wherever I believed they would be helpful, and minimized them where I thought it would be more beneficial. The methodology behind this approach is too extensive to explain here, but anyone who takes the time to reflect on it will understand. Any success I have achieved is due to God alone, and any errors or oversights are my own, or from Satan. God and His Messenger are free from such faults.

The Roots of Zionism

The Jewish claim to Jerusalem and Palestine is grounded in their belief that it is the Holy Land where their prophets—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—lived. Moses and Aaron also journeyed there, as the prophets after them. It was in this land that they experienced the height of their glory: the era of David and Solomon, the two prophetic kings who ruled from Jerusalem. After their deaths, the kingdom weakened and divided, ultimately disintegrating under the successive conquests of the Babylonian, Egyptian, and Roman empires. During these times, the Jews either lived in the land as an oppressed and defeated people or were driven out and taken captive as slaves.

Jewish Attempts to Return to Jerusalem

For over three thousand years, Jews have harbored the dream of returning to the Holy Land and re-establishing their state there. Throughout history, they have made several attempts, all of which ultimately failed, raising questions about their seriousness and feasibility. Among the most notable attempts are:

1. David Raubini's Attempt (1523): This effort is surrounded by mystery, with much of its narrative taking on a legendary character.[1]

2. Joseph Nasi's Attempt (1561): A Jewish man who fled the Spanish Inquisition and later entered the court of the Ottoman Sultan. It is said he attempted to bring Jewish groups to Tiberias, a city he was granted the right to administer and rebuild.[2]

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[1] See the introduction of *The Diaries of David Reubeni*, by David Reubeni [Arabic ed.]

[2] Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, p.89. Also, see Essam Sakhnini, *Tabariyah: Tārīkh Mawsūʿī*, p.252 ff.

Considering the context and details of these efforts, it is difficult to regard them as genuine attempts to return. Instead, they appear to have been efforts to protect Jews fleeing the Inquisition by offering them a haven under the patronage of a wealthy Jewish figure with connections to the Ottoman Sultan.

It is likely that all of this would have been forgotten had the establishment of Israel not spurred Zionists and historians to delve into their history and seek traces of older attempts. Three Ottoman documents, dated 989 AH/1581 CE, 991 AH/1583 CE, and 993 AH/1585 CE, shed light on the Ottoman authorities' efforts to prevent Jews from settling in the Sinai Peninsula, particularly around Mount Sinai.[1]

As time passed and the Ottoman Empire underwent changes while Western empires rose, the Jews sought to take advantage of these shifts. In Europe, the situation for Jews improved, surpassing their conditions during the Middle Ages. Additionally, a new Christian sect—Protestantism—emerged and gained control in several countries, bringing an ideology that was more favorable to Jews. This will be explored further shortly. These developments renewed Jewish hopes that their return to Palestine might be approaching. Such hopes manifested in appeals, poems, writings, and eventually in movements aimed at gathering Jews in Palestine.[2]

One key aspect that heightens the sensitivity and complexity of the issue is that contemporary Jews believe that the Temple (the great temple) built by Solomon, which was completely destroyed, was located where the Al-Aqsa Mosque now stands. This essentially means that rebuilding the Temple would require demolishing Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is the first Qibla and the third holiest mosque in Islam. Thus, at its core, the conflict is religious, and it can only be resolved through the definitive victory of one side over the other. Sacred sites do not allow for compromise or

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[1] See: The texts of the documents and commentary in Ibrahim Abdel Latif, *Min Wathāïq al-Tārikh al-ʿArabi* (*From the Documents of Arab History*,) Magazine of Cairo University in Khartoum, issue 2, 1971, p.94 ff.

[2] Regina Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism* (Arabic ed.), p.39 ff., pp.59-60, 64 ff. *Al-Mawsūah al-Siyāsiyah*, Abdel Wahhab al-Kayyali (Editor), vol.3, p.659.

division, and no one has the authority to act upon or relinquish them.

Zionist Christianity

Christians hold that Jesus, the son of Mary, was born in Palestine, specifically in Bethlehem. It was here that he was sent as a prophet, crucified for the salvation of humanity, and laid to rest in his tomb. As a result, they view this land as sacred and believe they have a religious duty to "liberate the tomb of Christ" from the control of infidels (i.e., Muslims).

Christianity was formally adopted by the Roman Empire under Emperor Constantine, three centuries after Christ's death. The empire later split into two branches. The Eastern Byzantine Empire had Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) as its capital, the Hagia Sophia as its church, Greek as its language, and Orthodox Christianity as its doctrine, while the Western Roman Empire had Rome as its capital, the Vatican as its religious center, and Latin as its language.

The region of Greater Syria, including Jerusalem, was under the control of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire for many centuries, except for brief intervals of Persian influence. Following the Islamic conquests of Syria and Egypt in the 7th century, Muslim rule prevailed in these areas for more than twelve centuries.

During the Crusades, however, Western Christians, specifically the Catholic Latins aligned with the Vatican, managed to control Jerusalem for a brief period. The Crusader presence in the Levant lasted for about two centuries, but their hold on Jerusalem itself was limited to approximately a hundred years. In the late 12th century, the great Muslim leader Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (Saladin) liberated Jerusalem, and the Mamluks later completed the task of expelling the Crusaders entirely, thereby reclaiming the region for the Muslims.

The situation remained as such until a hundred years ago, when the British captured Jerusalem in December 1917. On that day, a

British newspaper famously declared, "The Crusades have now ended."[1]

However, the British entry was not led by the Orthodox or Catholics but by a new religious group: the Protestants. Protestantism originated as a break from the Catholic Church, initiated by the German priest Martin Luther (1483-1546). After years of struggle, Protestantism eventually gained dominance in the most powerful Western nations, beginning with Britain and later extending to the United States.

This Protestant group introduced several new beliefs, including a unique perspective on the Jews, which is particularly relevant here. Catholics traditionally held that, after the coming of Christ, the Jewish people had lost their position as the "Chosen People" because they rejected Christ. Consequently, Catholics saw the Church as the legitimate continuation of the faithful mentioned in the Torah, representing those who believed in both the Torah and the Gospel.

From this perspective, the Catholic Church interpreted mentions in the Torah about a Jewish return to the Holy Land as either fulfilled historically or symbolically representing the Catholic Church itself as the true spiritual successor to the Torah's faithful.

When the Protestants emerged, they introduced a perspective that saw contemporary Jews not as a deviation but as a continuation of the faithful lineage described in the Bible. This led them to believe that modern Jews were promised a return to the Holy Land—a return viewed as essential preparation for the Second Coming of Christ.

Protestants also challenged the clergy's monopoly on reading and interpreting the Bible, asserting that Scripture should be accessible to everyone. Each individual could interpret God's word independently, eliminating the need for clerical mediation. This

[1] This statement is attributed to General Edmund Allenby after his entry into Jerusalem on December 11, 1917, following the British capture of the city. (ARK)

movement led to widespread translation of the Bible into local European languages, facilitating its distribution. As a result, Jewish history and the narratives of Israelite prophets in the Holy Land received renewed focus, often at the expense of traditional Catholic saints and historical figures. This collective re-reading highlighted Jesus as a prophet within Israel's lineage, emphasizing that Christianity's "divine figure" was, indeed, born Jewish.

Over time, various ideas took root and interacted within the European imagination. In regions dominated by Protestantism—particularly Britain, which would later become a global power—a historical view developed that identified Palestine as the ancestral land of the Jews. This perspective saw Jews as a people exiled from their homeland and interpreted the Bible as foretelling and affirming their return to this sacred land. Beginning in the 17th century, books and literature emerged to support and promote this concept.[1]

This spurred what is now termed "non-Jewish Zionism" or "Christian Zionism," a fusion of beliefs united by the conviction that Jews should be restored to Palestine. Unfortunately, this religious aspect of the issue is not as prominent in the Islamic world, where secular governments and their media, educational, and cultural systems often emphasize political dimensions while neglecting the religious underpinnings. A closer examination reveals that Christian Zionism is a deeply entrenched ideology, widespread among various Western elites, whether political, cultural, or economic. In essence, Zionism represents a modern continuation of the medieval Crusades.

These Christian Zionist beliefs fused with political ideologies, shaping agendas across various domains. Proponents aimed to directly enact these beliefs or to convince secular politicians to integrate them into policy. Many secular or non-religious politicians, though not personally invested in these beliefs,

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[1] For examples of works by Christians advocating for the return of Jews to Palestine, see Regina Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism*, specifically pages 30-31, 42 ff, and p.55 and beyond.

recognized Zionist ideas as advantageous tools to further their own objectives of territorial expansion and strategic influence, using these ideas to mobilize a variety of resources and energies. A third group, meanwhile, saw Zionism as an effective solution to what was known as the "Jewish question" in Europe, regarding it as a method to relocate Jewish populations from Europe back to their desired homeland.[1]

This confluence of ideological, political, and strategic interests found a favorable moment during one of the most pivotal periods in Islamic history: the occupation of the Levant by Muhammad Ali Pasha.

The Decisive Decade in Reviving the Idea of Israel

The beginning of the decline and weakening of Islamic civilization in relation to the West is often marked by the moment of Napoleon's campaign in Egypt and Syria. Leading the French forces, Napoleon successfully occupied Egypt and advanced into Syria, reaching Acre. The Mamluks in Egypt, vassals of the Ottoman Empire, alongside their Ottoman allies, were unable to repel the foreign armies. This was the first instance of non-Muslim forces successfully occupying Cairo since its establishment and capturing the Islamic capital in Egypt since the Islamic conquest. This event was a profound shock to the Muslim world and symbolized the beginning of a new era.

It was reported in the French press that Napoleon—though an atheist by belief who feigned religious devotion when politically necessary—called on the Jews to return to the Holy Land during his campaign toward Syria.[2] While the authenticity of this claim remains uncertain, it marked the first indication of a convergence of Jewish and Western interests. However, Napoleon's failure at the Siege of Acre resulted in the temporary suspension of this initiative.

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[1] For more details, see Regina al-Sharif; Abdel Wahab El-Messiri, *Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism, and Zionism*, Vol. 6, p.136 and beyond.
[2] Regina Sharif, p.73 and beyond.

After French forces were expelled from Egypt by an Ottoman-British alliance, the French sought an ally who could help them maintain influence in the region. They found such a figure in Muhammad Ali, an ambitious officer in the Ottoman army, who had played a pivotal role in driving the French out. Deeply impressed by Napoleon and his policies, Muhammad Ali formed an alliance with the French. With French support and the backing of local leaders and religious figures, Muhammad Ali eventually seized control of Egypt.[1]

Muhammad Ali is recognized as one of the most influential figures in Middle Eastern history over the past two centuries. His achievements far surpassed those of Napoleon in Egypt, where he ruled for nearly fifty years. A ruthless and ambitious leader, he established a centralized, modern state in Egypt, modeled after Western powers. His reign, however, was marked by severe oppression, and despite claiming loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, his authoritarian rule often exceeded even that of Napoleon.

Muhammad Ali suffered defeat in every conflict against non-Muslim forces, which were often forced upon him. However, his victories came in wars against fellow Muslims, leaving a history of massacres across the Hejaz, Sudan, Egypt, and Syria. His most significant military campaign took place in the Levant, where, using an army of Egyptians, he conquered Syria from the Ottoman Empire, defeating its forces and nearly advancing to Constantinople. This posed a serious challenge to the West, prompting intervention from Britain, Russia, and France to restore Ottoman rule over Egypt and Syria. Eventually, after ten years of struggle, Muhammad Ali was forced to relinquish control of Syria, securing Egypt as a hereditary monarchy for his descendants.

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[1] Ilyas al-Ayyubi, *Tarikh Misr fi ʿAhd al-Khidiwi Ismaʿil*, vol.1, p.328 and beyond, in which he is quoting from the memoirs of Ferdinand de Lesseps, the son of the French consul and a close friend of Muhammad Ali, as well as the concessionaire of the Suez Canal.

The ten years Muhammad Ali spent ruling Syria, including his control of Jerusalem, played a pivotal role in the revival of the idea of Israel, influencing the future geopolitical landscape.

Muhammad Ali's policies in Egypt and the Levant were marked by aggressive occupation, indistinguishable from the colonialism of the British and French. His Muslim identity and nominal allegiance to the Ottoman Empire made his rule even more brutal and dangerous, complicating resistance against him. His policy in Syria can be summarized in a single phrase: Muhammad Ali worked to solidify foreign dominance at the expense of his subjects, prioritizing the interests of Jews and Christians over those of Muslims. This reflected a strategic shift that fostered greater foreign influence in the region, often to the detriment of the local Muslim populations.

Muhammad Ali encouraged Jewish migration to Egypt and integrated them into his administration, increasing their presence in key roles.[1] One noteworthy document, dating back nine years before his occupation of Syria, is a letter from a Jewish individual in the Levant. It details the conditions in Syria, Iraq, and Iran, while also predicting future developments in Syria.[2] This could point to an organized Jewish network working in Muhammad Ali's favor within these territories. Upon his conquest of Syria, Muhammad Ali removed taxes that had been imposed on Christian and Jewish pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem,[3] repaired Greek Orthodox monasteries, and established a quarantine station for Christian pilgrims.[4] Furthermore, he allocated the funds raised from these

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[1] Mikhail Fenter, *The Relations of Jews with Authorities and Non-Jewish Society*, in Yaʿqūb Landau, *The Liberation of Egypt During the Ottoman Period*, Cairo: National Center for Translation, 2000, p.522.

[2] Asad Rustam, *The Egyptian Royal Archives: A Statement of the Documents of the Levant and What Helps to Understand Them and Clarifies the Aims of Muhammad Ali Pasha*, Beirut: American University, 1940, vol.1, p.44.

[3] Constantine Bazili, *Syria and Palestine under Ottoman Rule*, translated by Tariq Masrani, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989, pp. 114–116; Dawud Barakat, *The Heroic Conqueror Ibrahim*, Cairo: Hindawi Foundation, 2014, p. 35.

[4] Asad Rustam, vol.3, p.134.

pilgrims to the monks, an action that stands in contrast to his otherwise centralized, state-controlled financial policies.

From the outset, Muhammad Ali prioritized constructing and renovating synagogues, even before solidifying his control over Syria.[1] Nine synagogues were built in Jerusalem,[2] along with numerous churches and monasteries.[3] Within the Jewish community, debates arose over whether to focus on additional synagogues or housing to accommodate the influx of Jewish immigrants,[4] as Jerusalem saw steady growth in both Jewish and Christian populations.[5]

Christians were also permitted to restore and build churches without prior authorization from Ottoman authorities, as previously required. Foreigners gained access to Islamic holy sites under local protection, signaling a shift in policy.[6] Additionally, foreign merchants were allowed to trade within the Syrian interior, previously restricted by the Ottomans to coastal cities. Taxes on Muslim trade were seven times higher than those on foreign trade,[7] and oversight on foreign commerce was significantly reduced.[8] Foreign merchants were even permitted entry into Damascus,[9] where a ceremonial reception was held for the British consul.[10] This was a stark contrast to the Ottoman restrictions that had previously limited foreign presence in Damascus, viewing Syria as sacred Islamic territory. Ottoman ships, meanwhile, were barred from

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1 Asad Rustam, vol.3, p.136.
2 Ibid., vol.4, p.296 and beyond.
3 Latifa Salim, *The Egyptian Rule in Syria*, pp.248-250.
4 Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths*, p.564.
5 Constantine Bazili, p.117; *Mukhakkarāt Tārīkhīyah*, Unknown author, pp.69-70.
6 Ibid., p.162.
7 Dawud Barakat, pp.133, 143.
8 Asad Rustam, vol.3, p.135.
9 Dawud Barakat, p.132.
10 *Mukhakkarāt Tārīkhī \yah*, p.25, 68-69; Dawud Barakat, p.189.

trading in Syria,[1] [marking a further shift in the region's economic dynamics.]

Foreigners and Jews were permitted to establish schools in Syria, where wealthy Jewish families founded modern institutions to create an educated Jewish elite. These schools aimed to empower Eastern Jewish youth to advocate for their community independently of Western influence.[2] Additionally, Christians and Jews were appointed to positions in the military and administration, receiving ranks and titles.[3] For the first time, Jews, Christians, Armenians, and foreigners were included in the "Jerusalem Advisory Council," which oversaw the city's affairs.[4] They were also granted licenses to launch economic and commercial projects, giving them access to Islamic endowment lands and properties under Ottoman control.[5]

In 1839, for the first time in Jerusalem's history, the British established a consulate, which soon became pivotal in supporting Jewish and Protestant communities across Jerusalem and the broader Syrian region. This consulate not only served as a significant hub for British influence but also as a base for missionary efforts.[6] Around this time, the American consul in Jaffa also sought to appoint a vice consul in Jerusalem,[7] marking the beginning of formal American involvement in the city.[8]

During this period, the first organized Jewish effort to claim part of the Burāq (Western) Wall Plaza, commonly known as the

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[1] Muhammad Farid, *al-Bahjah al-Tawfīqīyah fī Tārīkh Muʾassis al-ʿĀʾilah al-Khudaywīyah*, p.165.
[2] Dawud Barakat, p.189; Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, p.158; Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: Ritual Murder, Politics, and the Jews in 1840*, p.376.
[3] Dawud Barakat, p.189.
[4] Asad Rustam, *al-Usūl al-ʿArabīyah li Tārīkh Sūriyah fī ʿAhd Muhammad ʿAlī Pasha*, vol.5, pp.224-26; Mustafa ʿAbd al-Ghanī, *al-Awqāf ʿalā al-Quds*, p.120-23.
[5] Asad Rustam, *al-Mahfūẓāt al-Malakiyah al-Misrīyah*, vol.2, p.326, vol.3, 65-66.
[6] Karen Armstrong, pp.565-66; Dawud Barakat, p.143; Abd al-Aziz Awad, *Hijrat al-Yahūd ilā Filistīn wa Mawqif al-Dawlah al-ʿUthmānīyah mina*, vol.3, p.155.
[7] Asad Rustam, *al-Mahfūẓāt al-Malakiyah*, vol.2, p.349.
[8] Mustafa Abd al-Ghani, p.69.

Wailing Wall, took place with the assistance of the British consul and endorsement from the Egyptian authorities.[1]

Under Muhammad Ali's rule, Jews and Christians enjoyed a legal status that largely exempted them from the usual restrictions. Egyptian officials even punished soldiers who unintentionally offended these groups, sometimes pardoning Christians or Jews involved in serious incidents, such as the infamous "Badiri incident."[2] While Egyptian forces suppressed local uprisings with extreme measures, they showed a marked leniency toward Christian insurgents[3]—a stark contrast that underscored the hostility Muhammad Ali and his administration appeared to hold toward Islam and its followers.

Some mosques were repurposed as horse stables, while Muslims endured severe persecution. Many viewed this as a potential end to Islamic authority in the region.[4] Islamic endowments suffered from extensive confiscation and damage, while Christian and Jewish endowments were preserved and even

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[1] Asad Rustam, *al-Mahfūẓāt*, vol.4, p.294 and beyond; Mustafā ʿAbd al-Ghanī, p.125.

[2] *Mudhakkarāt Tārīkhīyah*, pp.80-81, 117, 121-22; Ili Levi Abū ʿAsal, *Yaqaẓat al-ʿĀlam al-Yahūdī*, p.154.
The "Badiri incident" refers to an episode during Muhammad Ali Pasha's governance of the Levant that exposed the tensions stemming from his policies toward religious communities. During his rule in the 1830s, Muhammad Ali notably granted new rights and protections to Christian and Jewish communities, which included educational, commercial, and property privileges traditionally reserved for Muslims. This shift fostered resentment among the local Muslim population, who felt increasingly marginalized, especially with heavy taxes and mandatory conscription. In the specific "Badiri incident," an Egyptian soldier reportedly offended a Jewish or Christian individual, whether by accident or otherwise. The authorities responded harshly toward the soldier to reinforce Muhammad Ali's pro-minority policies, furthering local frustrations. The incident highlighted the sense among Muslims that Muhammad Ali's administration had a significant bias, favoring non-Muslims and foreign interests over the traditional Islamic framework in the region.
See https://dorar.net/history/event/4471, and
https://www.hindawi.org/books/40837420/1.8/ [ARK].

[3] *Mudhakkarāt*, p.78; Rustam, *al-Mahfūẓāt*, vol.4, 356.

[4] Constantine Bazili, p.165; *Mudhakkarāt*, pp.59-60, 66; Dawud Barakat, p.139.

supported.[1] Numerous Muslim notables turned to foreign consulates for protection, seeking to avoid forced conscription, heavy taxes, and general oppression. Some even found refuge in the protection of Christian and Jewish staff within these consulates that enjoyed foreign immunity. As a result, respected Muslims found themselves reliant on former Christian and Jewish subjects, forced to endure subservience under Muhammad Ali's rule.[2] Many others left the region altogether in search of safety.

This upheaval led to a demographic transformation in Jerusalem, where Jews emerged as the majority, followed by Christians, with Muslims reduced to a minority.[3] The shift also transformed the social and economic landscape, with Muslims at the lowest rung, Jews and Christians elevated above them, and foreign nationals holding the highest status of all.

The shift in political, social, and economic dynamics during Muhammad Ali's rule inspired Moses Montefiore, a wealthy Jewish financier, to pursue a plan for Jewish resettlement in Palestine. This initiative marked the first significant attempt to establish a Jewish presence in the region before Theodor Herzl. Montefiore sought to acquire large tracts of land with special rights for agriculture and trade. Muhammad Ali warmly embraced this proposal, even offering self-governance for the purchased villages.[4] Montefiore successfully established agricultural settlements, industrial projects, and the first Jewish neighborhood outside Jerusalem's walls, granting Jews in Syria and Palestine a privileged status.

With the support of the British consul, these developments ultimately transformed the Jewish community into a foreign entity, increasingly disconnected from the region, and capable of becoming a settler community. This shift in policy sparked the

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[1] For more details, see Muhammed Elhamy, *Fī Arwiqat al-Tārīkh*, vol.3, p.171 and beyond.

[2] Constantine Bazili, p.162.

[3] Karen Armstrong, p.567.

[4] For more details, see Ili Levi Abu Asal, p.144, 150-51m 171; *Malaf Wathāiq Filistīn*, vol.1, p.45; Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reeinharz, *Zionism and the Creation of a New Society*, p.43; Frankel, p.376.

broader idea of relocating Jews from Europe to Palestine. What began as religious aspirations evolved into a political discourse, with discussions in intellectual circles, political meetings, and eventually among government officials.[1]

For instance, the socialist thinker Charles Fourier, in his 1835-1836 work *La Fausse Industrie*, expressed deep anti-Semitism and suggested that the solution to the "Jewish question" was to expel Jews from Europe and resettle them in the Levant.[2]

2. In 1839, the Earl of Shaftesbury[3] wrote a review in the widely read *Quarterly Review* of a traveler's book on Palestine. Shaftesbury argued that the land could accommodate Jewish laborers under the oversight of the British consul in Jerusalem. By 1840, he had further refined this idea and presented it formally to Lord Palmerston in a memorandum (September 25, 1840), stressing the strategic advantages of a Jewish resettlement initiative for Britain.[4]

3. *The Times* reported that the idea of Jewish resettlement had become a political issue, and *The Globe*, a paper with close ties to the British Foreign Office, published articles throughout 1839–1840 advocating for relocating a significant Jewish population to the Levant. This concept gained Lord Palmerston's approval. That same year, he wrote to the British ambassador in Constantinople,

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[1] El-Messiri, vol.6, p.177.

[2] Ibid., vol.3, p.167.

[3]Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801–1885), was a leading 19th-century English social reformer renowned for his work in improving labor conditions and advocating for underprivileged groups. His major achievements include supporting the Factory Act of 1842, which banned women and children under 13 from working underground in mines, and championing "ragged schools" that offered free education to impoverished children. He was also involved in the Peabody housing scheme, which aimed to provide affordable housing for the working class, and he promoted animal welfare and evangelical Christian causes. By 1839, Shaftesbury had already made significant contributions to social reform and was gaining influence as a philanthropist and advocate for humanitarian issues.

[4] *Malaff Wathâiq Filistin*, vol.1, p.47; Regina Sharif, p.62; El-Messiri, vol.6, p.161.

proposing the establishment of a Jewish state as a buffer for the Ottoman Empire against Muhammad Ali.[1]

4. In 1841, Colonel Churchill presented a memorandum to Moses Montefiore, suggesting the formation of a political movement to support the restoration of Jewish presence in Palestine.[2]

In summary, Muhammad Ali's policies in Syria catalyzed discussions around establishing a Jewish state. His influence thus positioned him, if not as the founder, then as a significant precursor to Israel's eventual establishment. Without external political constraints, Israel might have been founded fifty years earlier.[3]

Ottoman Resistance to a Jewish State

While Muhammad Ali's ambitions in Syria were ultimately thwarted, his policies left a lasting impact that shaped the region's future. Following their reclamation of Syria, the Ottoman Empire struggled to fully restore the previous order. The area had undergone significant transformations, including an increase in Jewish communities, economic projects, and the establishment of a British consulate, which symbolized enduring foreign influence. Additionally, the Ottoman return to power was heavily dependent on British support, reinforcing a foreign—particularly British—presence that would later influence the political landscape.

Though Muhammad Ali's efforts may have ended, Jewish initiatives continued. Between his departure from Syria and the rise of Herzl and Zionism, various attempts were made to establish a

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[1] Regina Sharif, pp.83-84, 91; Rafiq Shaker al-Nashtah, *al-Sultān ʿAbd al-Hamīd al-Thānī wa Filistīn*, p.83; David Fromkin: *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, p.301; El-Messiri, vol.6, p.153 and beyond.

[2] El-Messiri, vol.6, p.145.

[3] In this study, I have taken special care to verify each piece of information with its sources. Nearly all sources stem from original documents or eyewitness accounts, given the sensitive and significant nature of the subject matter and its relative obscurity among most historians of this period.

Jewish presence. One such effort was by the Jewish traveler Laurence Oliphant,[1] who proposed a plan in 1880, described in his book *The Land of Gilead*. Another was by Samuel Montagu, a British Jewish banker, parliament member, and leader of the Lovers of Zion, who in 1893 appealed to Sultan Abdulhamid II to permit Jewish settlement in eastern Jordan. In the same year, German Zionist Bohlen Dorf suggested a scheme to bring Zionist settlers to eastern Jordan, intending to drive out the Bedouins.[2] During this period, numerous Jewish organizations in Europe and Russia were established to support Jewish migration to Palestine and bolster the Jewish community there through financial aid or the development of agricultural and industrial projects.[3]

Additionally, Jewish settlement efforts were cloaked in and bolstered by foreign influence, primarily through two channels: influential politicians and decision-makers in European capitals, and foreign consuls stationed in the Levant representing these powers.

Prominent political leaders aligned imperial interests with the aim of Jewish resettlement in Palestine. Significant roles were played by figures such as Ernest Laharanne,[4] Napoleon III's

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[1] Laurence Oliphant (3 August 1829 – 23 December 1888), a Member of Parliament, was a South African-born British author, traveler, diplomat, British intelligence agent, Christian mystic, and Christian Zionist. His best-known book in his lifetime was a satirical novel, *Piccadilly* (1870). However, after his death, he has become more famous for his plan to establish Jewish farming communities in the Holy Land, *The Land of Gilead*. Oliphant was a UK Member of Parliament for Stirling Burghs. For more, see Wikipedia (Laurence Oliphant.)

[2] Theodor Herzl, *Diaries of Theodor Herzl*. 1st Arabic ed. Beirut: Palestin Research Center, 1968, p.542, see Appendix; Amin Abdullah, *Mashārīʿ al-Istītān al-Yahūdī mundh Qiyān al-Thawrah al-Faransā hattā Niyāhat al-Harb al-ʿĀlamiyah al-ʾŪlā* (*Jewish Settlement Projects from the French Revolution until the End of World War I*), Kuwait: ʿĀlam al-Maʿrifah Series (no.74), p. 145; Abd al-Wahab El-Messiri, vol.6, p.313.

[3] Abd al-Aziz Awad, *Nashʾat al-Istītān al-Suhyūnī fi Filistīn*. Al-Majallah al-Tārīkhīyah al-Misrīyah, issue, 21, p.256 and beyond.

[4] Ernest Laharanne, born Jean Ernest Laharanne on November 8, 1840, in Sauveterre-de-Béarn and died on10 July 1897 in Moulins, is a French political writer. Editor-in-chief of *L'Etat: newspaper of the Republic and commercial freedom*, which he had bought from Louis Ulbach under the title *La Cloche*, his paper

private secretary, who authored a work promoting Jewish return,[1] and Lord Palmerston, Britain's Foreign Secretary and later Prime Minister. Palmerston made considerable efforts to secure the Ottoman Sultan's approval for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Other advocates,[2] including Lloyd George,[3] drew on deep-rooted Protestant education and familiarity with Biblical lands, noting that he knew the villages of Palestine[4] better than European locations and was more acquainted with Israelite kings and prophets than British monarchs.[5]

Overall, many European nations issued Balfour-like promises or comparable pledges. The United States also joined in exerting pressure on the Ottomans, particularly after anti-Jewish pogroms erupted in Russia in 1881.[6]

As for the foreign consuls, they worked—whenever possible—to purchase land in Palestine under the foreign ownership laws that existed in the Ottoman Empire, much as they do in other countries even today. This practice often exploited existing conditions, some of which were naturally established, such as laws allowing foreigners to own land or property, and others stemming from the aftermath of Muhammad Ali's era or from

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supported free trade. As a liberal Catholic, Laharrane had belonged to the= secretariat of Napoleon III. He is famous for having proposed the reconstitution of Jewish nationality as early as 1860. He supported this idea on the principle of nationalities which Napoleon III had adopted. Moses Hess quotes him in his *Rome and Jerusalem. The Last National Question* (Eleventh Letter), 1862. See the French Wikipedia.

[1] Regina Sharif, p.77; El-Messiri, vol.6, p.153.

[2] See Ili Levi Abu Asal, pp.179-80.

[3] Lloyd George was the head of the government in which Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, issued his famous declaration. Although Lloyd George was much more influential than Balfour, the prominence of the declaration brought Balfour recognition, overshadowing his Prime Minister.

[4] See Sharif, p.80 and beyond.

[5] George Antonius, *Yaqazat al-ʿArab* (The Arab Uprising), p.372; Regina Sharif, p.109; David Fromkin, p.300.

[6] For information on the Zionist issue in America and its development, refer to Michael Oren's *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present*, (Arabic edition), translated by al-Hindawi Foundation, London, 2009, pp. 305 and onward.

Ottoman weakness. This weakness was evident in the financial crisis that plagued the Ottoman state, which led to mounting debts occasionally forcing it to auction lands to raise funds. Additionally, foreign consuls extended protection to Jews under foreign privileges and used consular influence to solidify the Jewish presence and empower them. Moreover, many consuls actively circumvented and violated Ottoman laws.[1]

Undoubtedly, this foreign influence infiltrated the Ottoman Sultanate through corrupt officials—whether they were Westernized figures inclined toward foreign interests or driven by personal gain and desires.[2]

Thus, examining the Ottoman resistance to a Jewish state involves more than Sultan Abdulhamid II's response to Herzl, which will be discussed later. This resistance predates Herzl and Zionism. As previously noted, Ottoman sultans during the empire's periods of strength issued decrees opposing Jewish settlement in the Sinai, centuries before these later developments. Among the notable actions taken by the later Ottoman sultans to counter Jewish settlement were:

1. The disruption of Moses Montefiore's large-scale settlement project, initially approved by Muhammad Ali but thwarted upon the reestablishment of Ottoman control over Syria. This blow severely hindered and dismantled Montefiore's settlement ambitions.[3]

2. An Ottoman document dated Rabī' al-Thānī 6, 1262 AH/April 3, 1846 CE, contains an order from Sultan Abdul Mejid

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[1] For further reference, consult:

-Amin Abdullah, *Jewish Settlement Projects*, p. 33 onward.

-Isa al-Qaddūmi, *The Ottoman Archive and the Historical Treasures of Jerusalem*, Bayt al-Maqdis Studies Series, Issue 5, Winter 2008.

-Naila Al-Waṙi's comprehensive study, *The Role of Foreign Consulates in Jewish Migration and Settlement in Palestine: 1840–1914*, 1st Edition, Amman: Dār Al-Shurūk, 2007.

[2] See Laurance Oliphant, *The Land of Gilead,* p,430, 461, 484; *Herzl's Diaries*, p.356 onward.

[3] Ili Levi Abu Asal, p.171.

(Abdülmecid) to the *Mutasarrif* (governor) of Jerusalem. In this directive, the governor was instructed to repossess land that had been purchased by a British Jewish individual and to resell it to an Ottoman citizen. The document highlights that a prior law prohibited foreign Jews from owning land in Palestine.[1]

3. The persistent attempts by Lord Palmerston—first as British Foreign Secretary and later as Prime Minister—to secure Ottoman permission for granting a portion of Palestinian land to Jewish settlers.[2] These ultimately failed due to what was described as "the firm obstinacy of the Sublime Porte."[3]

4. On Rajab 18, 1287 AH/October 13, 1870 CE, Sultan Abdulaziz issued a royal decree affirming that Palestinian lands were "state-owned" (*arazi-i emiriye*), thereby designating them as Ottoman crown lands to prevent Jewish settlement. Approximately 20% of these lands remained privately owned.

5. In 1874, Jerusalem's administrative status was elevated to a *mutasarrifate* (governance), linking it directly to the capital of Istanbul, rather than to provincial governors, thus enhancing its administrative significance and placing it under closer oversight from the Ottoman capital.

6. Laurence Oliphant attributed the failure of his own 1880 settlement project to what he perceived as the primary political priority of Sultan Abdulhamid II and his officials: resisting foreign influence in all its forms.[4]

7. Likewise, repeated American attempts, led by successive U.S. ambassadors to Sultan Abdulhamid II, aimed to open Palestine to Jewish refugees fleeing Russian pogroms, but were also unsuccessful. Despite subsequent official American condemnation of Ottoman policies, none of these efforts had any lasting impact.[5]

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[1] Isa al-Qaddūmī.
[2] See *Malaff Wathāïq Filistīn*, vol.1, p.47 onward.
[3] Harold Temperley, *England and the Near East*, p.444.
[4] Laurance Oliphant, p.464.
[5] Michael Oren, p.311.

8. In Jumada al-Awwal 1299 AH/April 1882 CE, as Jewish emigration from Russia began in response to intensified persecution, Sultan Abdulhamid II issued a decree informing Jewish individuals seeking refuge in the Ottoman Empire that they would not be permitted to settle in Palestine. Instead, they were allowed to migrate to other Ottoman provinces, where they could settle on the condition that they became Ottoman subjects. Two months later, in Rajab 1299 AH/June 1882 CE, a telegram was sent from central authorities to the governor of Jerusalem, instructing that Russian Jewish immigrants be prohibited from disembarking at Palestinian ports. Ships carrying them were directed to transport them to any other Ottoman port. Orders were subsequently issued to deport those who had already settled in Jerusalem, followed by similar directives to all provinces in the Levant to prevent the settlement or unauthorized entry of Jewish immigrants into Palestine.

In 1884, the Ottoman Empire issued a decree limiting the duration of Jewish visits to Palestine to one month. Under foreign pressure, this period was extended in 1887 to three months. Foreign pressure persisted, met with continued Ottoman resistance and strategic countermeasures. Overall, the 1880s marked a period of heightened Ottoman vigilance and active efforts to counter attempts by Jews—particularly those emigrating from Russia and surrounding areas—to settle in Palestine.

9. In the early 1890s, a series of successive decrees revealed an increasing Ottoman awareness of the Zionist plan to settle Jews in Palestine. On 25 Rabī' al-Thānī 1308 AH/December 7, 1890 CE, Sultan Abdulhamid II issued a decree to close the legal loopholes that had enabled some Jews to purchase private land. He also sought to purchase as much land in Palestine as possible from his personal treasury to prevent Jewish acquisitions.

On 21 Dhū al-Qa'dah 1308 AH/June 28, 1891 CE, the Sultan further instructed his ministers to deny entry to Jewish immigrants expelled from Europe into Ottoman lands, believing that their

settlement would eventually lead to the establishment of a "Mosaic government" and would involve "numerous conspiracies."

On 28 Dhū al-Qaʿdah 1308 AH/July 5, 1891 CE, Sultan Abdulhamid II reaffirmed his decision in a letter to the military committee, expressing that "the acceptance and settlement of these Jews or granting them citizenship is highly harmful, as it may eventually lead to the establishment of a Mosaic government." The following day, on 29 Dhū al-Qaʿdah 1308 AH/July 6, 1891 CE, Abdulhamid reiterated his position, rejecting the stance of countries that criticized his refusal to admit Jewish immigrants. He warned, "If these Jews settle in any part of the Ottoman Empire, they will gradually infiltrate Palestine despite any preventive measures, and they will seek to establish a Mosaic government with the encouragement and protection of European powers." In 1896, he further restricted Jewish land ownership, prohibiting Jewish companies from acquiring land and allowing ownership of immovable property only for Jewish settlers who had arrived before 1893.

It is important to note that all these measures were implemented before the emergence of Theodor Herzl and the establishment of the Zionist movement.[1]

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[1] For further reading on this topic, see:
- Ahmed Akgündüz, *The Unknown Ottoman State*, 1st ed., Istanbul: Ottoman Research Foundation, 2008, p.448 ff.
- Abdulaziz Awad, *Jewish Immigration to Palestine and the Ottoman State's Stance*, Al-ʾĀdāb Journal, Riyadh University, 1974, vol. 3, p. 160.
- Orkhan Muhammad Ali, *Sultan Abdulhamid II*, 4th ed., Cairo: Dar Al-Nil, 2008, p.214 ff.
- Naela Al-Waari, *The Role of Foreign Consulates*, p.192 ff.
- Marwan Abu Shammala, *The Zionist Strategy Towards Jerusalem*, Master's Thesis, Gaza: Islamic University, College of Arts, 2012, p.108 ff.
- Muhammad Shaaban Sawwan, *The Sultan and History: Why We Study Ottoman History*, 1st ed., Algiers-Beirut: Ibn Al-Nadim, Rawāfed, 2016.p. 289 ff.
Also, for a dedicated work on this topic: Dr. Hassan Hallaq, *The Ottoman State's Position on the Zionist Movement*.

This does not imply that the desired outcome was fully achieved. Indeed, there were breaches due to the Ottoman state's weakening, strong foreign influence, administrative corruption, and other factors.[1] However, the aim here is to emphasize that the Ottomans consistently sought to protect Palestine and resist the establishment of a Jewish state. This should be self-evident and not require extensive proof, as it is natural for states to defend their territories and guard against the formation of independent entities within their borders. Nonetheless, we find it necessary to address this for two reasons:

First, the prevalent modern narrative accusing the Ottoman state of betraying the Arabs and neglecting Palestine has come to be accepted as "truth" by successive generations. This narrative is increasingly promoted today to further distort Turkey's image and policies, particularly under Erdoğan's leadership.

Second, the misguided policies of modern Arab regimes have promoted a concept of nationalism and patriotism that has, for many, lessened the perceived gravity of abandoning Palestine and Jerusalem. This issue has come to be regarded as politically acceptable, leading many to believe that Arab and Muslim leaders are not obligated to liberate Palestine, fight the Zionists, or honor Al-Aqsa Mosque and rally in its defense. Instead, such actions are seen as optional or secondary. This view arises from a form of nationalism that is contrary to Islam, where rulers are deemed responsible solely for the borders of their own countries' borders—borders originally imposed by colonial powers.

Consequently, the sanctity of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa has diminished in the minds of many, and they have come to accept the idea that the Ottomans might have relinquished these lands for political or financial gain—a misconception that must be corrected. The Ottoman Empire held these lands in deep

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[1] For more details, see Orhan Muhammad Ali, *Sutan Abdulhamid II*, p.215-16; Naela al-Waʾarī, p.195 ff.

reverence, referring to the Levant as "Sham Sharif" or Noble Sham, with Jerusalem at its heart.

The Establishment of the Zionist Movement

Christians hold that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus Christ, the son of Mary, or at least contributed to it by betraying him to the Roman authorities, ultimately leading to his crucifixion. Christian texts detail the suffering and agony he endured on the cross. Consequently, persecution of the Jews by Christians became a recurring pattern in history, especially in the Levant after the Roman emperors converted to Christianity. This often led Jews to ally with the Persians during their attacks on the Levant, assisting the invading forces in destroying churches, killing Christians, and looting treasures. These actions intensified hostility towards the Jews and provoked sweeping acts of vengeance whenever the Romans regained control of the Levant. Roman emperors and military commanders in the region dealt some of the most crushing blows to the Jews, scattering them widely and severely.

In medieval Europe, Christian persecution of Jews was a prominent aspect of the period, with Jews being repeatedly expelled from various countries at different points in history.

The reasons behind these expulsions were a blend of religious, political, economic, and social factors. Religious tension was rooted in perceived Jewish hostility toward Christ, while political and economic motivations stemmed from the Jewish community's inclination toward isolation.[1] Jews often concentrated in specific areas that became known as Jewish quarters or exclusive communities (ghettos), frequently monopolizing certain trades, particularly commerce and gold, along with engaging in usury. This both increased their separation from wider society and intensified

[1] Shahin Makarios, *Tārīkh al-Isrāʾīlyīn* (*The History of the Israelites*), p.18.

hostility toward them. Additionally, a general societal aversion to outsiders, coupled with the tendency of rulers to rely on minorities to advance their interests or schemes, created conditions that could turn against both rulers and minorities during periods of public unrest or popular protest.[1]

If Christians themselves engaged in destructive religious wars throughout the medieval era—inter-sectarian conflicts between Catholics, Orthodox, and later Protestants—then how much more intense would tensions be when involving Jews, who were not only a religious minority but also socially isolated, maintaining an insular lifestyle, and viewed by some as an economically parasitic group?

The situation of Jews in Europe began to improve as the continent gradually distanced itself from Christianity and the dominance of the Church, giving rise to secularism, nationalism, the modern state system, and positive laws and legislation. This shift altered how Jews were perceived, with an increasing view of them as citizens rather than merely as Jews. As a result, they gained opportunities to serve as officials in government departments, with some rise to become members of parliament or ministers. Additionally, they were able to achieve financial success, which was protected by secular laws enacted by elected parliaments, representing the interests of powerful networks and influences within the state.[2] Jews became owners of banks and financial institutions, with capital often capable of funding royal and princely wars and covering the budget deficits of states and governments.[3] This coincided with the rise of Protestantism, which brought with it a Christian Zionist movement that, as we discussed

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[1] El-Messiri, vol.2, p.335.

[2] One famous story that reflects Christians' confusion in dealing with the new situation of Jews is William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. The play depicts how the Jewish moneylender exploited the law in the Italian city of Venice to the point of seeking to shed the blood of the Christian who owed him money. The court found itself caught in a dilemma between enforcing the law, which favored the Jew, and the deep religious traditions that prohibited the shedding of a Christian's sacred blood, especially at the hands of a "profane" Jew. This is the central conflict of the story.

[3] Shahin Makarios, pp.73, 193.

earlier, positioned Jews as objects of sympathy, care, and even respect and reverence. As a result, the situation for Jews improved significantly, with their conditions advancing in leaps and bounds.

However, this was true for Western Europe, not for Eastern Europe and Russian territories. In these regions, Jews remained marginalized, suffering persecution and fear, and facing constant retribution as the perceived source of all evil. The situation for Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe exploded following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, when Jews were blamed for the act. They lived in an atmosphere of fear and terror, which sparked waves of Jewish migration from Russia and Eastern Europe to Western Europe.

This migration played a critical role in the success of the Zionist project. Jews in Western Europe, whose conditions had improved, were not eager to emigrate and viewed Zionist plans as a conspiracy to expel them from Europe under the guise of returning them to their ancestral homeland. On the other hand, Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe, fleeing from unbearable conditions, sought any refuge they could find. They provided the human capital that, combined with Western European interests, contributed to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

These refugees from Eastern Europe revived the idea of the "Jewish Question" among Western politicians. Efforts from both Jewish and the non-Jewish Zionists worked to make the easiest and most feasible solution the relocation of Jews to Palestine, whether seen as a religious belief or a colonial political interest.[1]

Thus, the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was the price paid by the Muslim world, through its blood and lives, as

[1] It is important to note here that some of the key figures who provided significant services to the Zionist movement held a deep disdain for Jews, such as Chamberlain, Lloyd George, Balfour, and Sykes. These individuals and the Zionist movement shared the common goal of relocating Jews to Palestine, albeit with differing intentions and motivations. For example, see: George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, p. 372; Regina Sharif, pp. 106, 108, 116, 120, 163, 167; Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred-Year War*, p. 62.

a European compensation to the Jews for the persecution they had suffered during most periods of European history. It also served as a solution to Europe's problems and its expansionist colonial interests, which invested in the Jews to establish a nation embedded like a thorn in the body of the Islamic East, entirely dependent on it, and serving as an advanced military base for European armies. In this manner, the weak continue to pay the price for the wars of the powerful.

Herzl and the Establishment of the Zionist Movement

All these circumstances came together to inspire a young Jewish journalist from Austria, named Theodor Herzl, who was a brilliant, astute, and highly active individual. He was able to skillfully leverage all the surrounding conditions to support the project of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine.

Herzl based his project on three main pillars:

1. The realistic possibility inspired by Muhammad Ali's policies, which had taken place sixty years earlier. Jews were still a majority in certain areas, with strong commercial activities and influence, while the Ottoman Empire remained weak.[1]

2. The rise of nationalism, which established the idea that each nation should have its own state with clearly defined political borders and independent sovereignty. Herzl's belief was that Jews were a people without a state, a nation without a land. This made it an ethical and natural obligation for Jews to have their own state. This idea formed the essence of his book *The Jewish State*, published in 1896, marking the beginning of his Zionist project. This movement held its first conference in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897, launching the efforts to establish a Jewish state.

3. The era of colonialism and European dominance, where Europe had substantial control over the world, either through direct occupation or significant influence in non-occupied regions. Therefore, establishing a state for the Jews was feasible if he could

[1] *Herzl's Diaries*, p.74.

convince Western politicians and align the idea of a Jewish state with Western colonial interests, addressing multiple issues at once—particularly the Jewish migration from Eastern Europe, which Western countries saw as a problem.

While Herzl was pursuing this, he discovered that Jews would not embrace the idea of a state for them unless it was in Palestine, specifically in Jerusalem. Initially, Herzl had considered locations like South America or Africa for the state, but he realized that the success of the project depended on connecting with the Jews' spiritual yearnings, dreams, and historical ties to the land. Consequently, he revised his plan to establish the Jewish state in Palestine.[1]

Herzl began his intense efforts to convince Western politicians of the project to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. He made numerous trips to Austria, Germany, Italy, France, England, and the Ottoman Empire, deploying all his intelligence and persuasive skills in each case. He tailored his approach to each country's specific interests, conflicts, and priorities, aiming to align the Jewish state project with the national objectives of those he approached.

For the Germans, the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine would help them manage the influx of Jewish refugees fleeing Russian persecution. It would also attract surplus Jewish labor and farmers, establishing a Middle Eastern state reliant on cheap Jewish labor and abundant raw materials. This would appeal to European investors and capital, particularly in comparison to China. Moreover, it would spare Germany from having to absorb persecuted Jewish workers who could potentially join revolutionary movements. The Jewish state would also act as a buffer against French and Russian ambitions (Germany's adversaries) in the event of the Ottoman Empire's collapse, as persecuted Jews would resist Russian influence. Additionally, the state would bolster Western policies in the region, support Eastern Christians, and prevent any single country, particularly Britain

[1] Ibid., p.70 ff.

(Germany's rival), from dominating the vital trade routes between East and West, which Britain already controlled through its holdings in India, the Arabian Gulf, Egypt (the Suez Canal), and Cyprus.[1]

For the British, Herzl proposed that the Jewish state would provide an alternative, shorter land route between East and West, ensuring Britain's complete control over transportation networks and colonial interests. The Jewish state would build a railway linking the Gulf to the Mediterranean, with a branch extending to Afghanistan—benefiting Britain more than any other power, at no cost to Britain, as the Jews would finance and manage the project. Furthermore, the establishment of a Jewish state in the region would weaken Turkey and prevent Russian expansion into the East. If the Jews succeeded in gaining the Sultan's favor through financial support, the Ottoman Empire could avoid borrowing from France and Russia (Britain's enemies), thus curbing their influence. For the religiously inclined British, there was also a theological motive: the Jews' return to their homeland was seen as a necessary precursor to the Second Coming of Christ.[2]

As for the Russians, Herzl presented the idea of a Jewish state as an excellent opportunity to resolve the "Jewish problem" by relocating Jews to Palestine. This relocation would be smooth and seamless, as the Jews themselves would welcome it. Since many Jews were Russian and shared their culture, the Jewish state would fall under Russian influence, effectively blocking the expansion of Western influence in the East. Moreover, the Jews would offer money to the Ottoman Sultan to purchase the land, and the Sultan would be compelled to use these funds to implement reforms and improvements, especially those pressured by Christian nations to better the situation of Christians. In effect, it would appear as though the Jews had financed the betterment of Christians, many of whom were influenced by Russia.[3] Herzl also took care to

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[1] Ibid., pp.23-24, 49, 65.
[2] Ibid., pp.50, 71.
[3] Ibid., pp.29, 66.

reassure them about Jerusalem, asserting, "Jerusalem will remain free from commercial transactions."[1]

Herzl even presented the project to a representative of the Pope, renouncing the holy sites that would not fall within the borders of the desired Jewish state, such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth.[2] Additionally, Herzl met with the young Egyptian leader Mustafa Kamil, who was only 23 years old at the time. Herzl was impressed by Kamil's enthusiasm to expel the British from Egypt and considered that this could align with the interests of the Zionist movement. Expelling the British would force them to relinquish control of the Suez Canal, thereby increasing their commitment to the Jewish state project, which would offer a land alternative.[3] Furthermore, Herzl skillfully leveraged Protestant doctrine, which believes that Christ's return will follow the return of the Jews to Palestine and worked to appeal to this belief among religious officials.[4]

In Europe, Herzl encountered another challenge: the skepticism of Jews about the project's seriousness and feasibility. The burden of three thousand years of failure and persecution was heavy. Many Jews, particularly rabbis and religious groups, viewed the project as a conspiracy against them, and a continuation of the long-standing efforts by anti-Semitic movements to expel them from Europe. These doubts were further fueled by the fact that the Zionist movement was secular, not religious, leading some to perceive it as an effort to displace them from their safe havens to a place where there was no guarantee of security or success. Despite these concerns, Herzl and the Zionist movement, after him, addressed them with all available means of persuasion and enticement—if not through coercion or even violence. Herzl did not simply represent the dreams of the Jews; he and the Zionist movement actively worked to rally Jews to the cause of a Jewish state, either by choice—if possible—or by force. Herzl famously

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[1] Ibid., p.183.
[2] *Herzl's Diaries*, p.27
[3] Ibid., pp.62-63.
[4] Ibid., p.71.

stated, "Anti-Semites will be our most reliable friends, and anti-Semitic countries will be our allies."[1] The Zionist movement even collaborated with the Nazis toward the goal of expelling Jews from Germany.[2]

Herzl's philosophy for establishing a Jewish state was entirely rooted in the power and tools of colonialism. Drawing from prior attempts that had failed to establish a Jewish presence despite considerable financial and logistical efforts, Herzl's approach proved successful. The creation of a Jewish state in Palestine would not have been possible without the support of colonial powers, with their coercive methods, armies, and fleets—regardless of Herzl's skills or the capabilities of the Jewish community. This reliance on colonial power was the key to his success where predecessors had failed over three thousand years. However, this philosophy had a darker side: it led to the acceptance and sacrifice of many Jews in brutal massacres to entice or pressure others into leaving their countries and emigrating to Palestine.

From the outset, Herzl firmly rejected advancing the Jewish state project through gradual Jewish infiltration into Palestine or by fabricating a "Jewish problem" that would prompt intervention from major powers. He was determined to avoid any appearance of Jews rebelling against the Sultan, as this would risk the entire project's failure or destruction. Instead, he aimed to make the Jewish state a decision of the major capitals, with the Sultan either consenting willingly through incentives or being pressured by the great powers. This strategy would secure the project's realization, encourage Jewish emigration, motivate wealthy Jews to support and finance it, and enable its establishment with minimal losses.[3]

Herzl and Sultan Abdulhamid II

Herzl's strategy inevitably led him to seek an audience with the Ottoman Sultan, Abdulhamid II, as this was the most direct path to securing land for the Jews in Palestine, then part of the Ottoman

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[1] Regina Sharif, pp. 164, 166.
[2] Ibid., p.168.
[3] *Herzl's Diaries*, pp.20-21, 24, 25, 38, 43, 64, 66-67, 81.

Empire. Herzl worked diligently to arrange a meeting with Abdulhamid and to craft a compelling proposal that would position a Jewish state as beneficial to the Ottoman Empire, presenting it as a valuable opportunity for the Sultan.

Herzl's proposal emphasized that a Jewish state in Palestine (intentionally distant from Jerusalem, as he dared not suggest establishing it there[1]) would serve as robust support and a protective shield for the Ottoman Empire. He argued that Jews still felt deep gratitude toward Muslims, especially the Ottomans, as they had suffered continuous persecution in Europe and had found refuge and stability only under Muslim rule. Historically, Jews had often sought sanctuary in Islamic lands to escape the Inquisition and religious persecution. Herzl portrayed them as the most loyal minority to Muslims, seeking protection ideally under Sultan Abdulhamid's rule. A Jewish state in the Levant, he claimed, would act as a buffer against European colonial ambitions, curbing their influence while bolstering Ottoman-Islamic power. Additionally, Jews from Europe and Russia would bring both capital and expertise, stimulating development in the region with affordable labor—all ultimately benefiting the Ottoman treasury.[2]

Herzl bolstered his proposal with a substantial financial offer at a time when the Ottoman Empire was facing a severe financial crisis, nearly forcing it to mortgage its finances to a European colonial commission to repay its heavy debts. Herzl's offer was a modest eighty thousand liras, yet he emphasized that such a financial proposal was unique. Only the Jews, he argued, were interested in purchasing land that otherwise held little appeal, presenting the Ottomans with an opportunity to free themselves from Europe's hold.[3]

In addition, Herzl promised to make efforts to calm the Armenians and their leaders in Europe. This was during a period of intense rebellion, when the Ottoman Empire's enemies were

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[1] *Herzl's Diaries*, pp.29, 33.
[2] Ibid., pp.57, 173 ff.
[3] Ibid., pp.25, 35, 55, 174 ff.

intervening to push for its division and grant the Armenians independence.[1] Herzl also vowed to use his media influence to defend Ottoman policies and the Sultan's image in the Western press, which relentlessly misrepresented and incited against him.

However, Sultan Abdulhamid rejected this offer and delivered his famous words to Herzl, "I cannot sell even a foot of this land, for it does not belong to me, but to my people. My people acquired this empire through the shedding of their blood. They have sustained it with their blood, and we will defend it with our blood before we allow anyone to take it from us. Let the Jews keep their billions, for if the empire is divided, the Jews may receive Palestine for nothing. But it will only be divided over our dead bodies, and I will not accept dismembering us for any purpose."[2]

Nevertheless, Abdulhamid sought to exploit Herzl and his energy and connections, so he did not sever ties with him. Through Izzat Pasha (a close advisor to Abdulhamid, an Arab from Damascus), he tempted Herzl with a second proposal: the idea of Jews purchasing Cyprus (then under British occupation) and gifting it to the Sultan, along with additional money, in exchange for a piece of land in Palestine. The proposal intrigued Herzl,[3] and he was also asked to calm the Armenian leaders and European newspapers regarding the land issue. Herzl made significant efforts in this regard, hoping it would bring him closer to his goal. During this time, he supported the Ottoman Empire and Abdulhamid, fearing that European powers might seek to depose the Sultan. His removal would spell trouble for the Zionist movement, as the new Sultan, backed by the West, would not need the Jews' money and would likely abandon the idea of a Jewish state. Herzl also supported the Ottoman Empire in its war against Greece, aided by Russia, launching medical and financial campaigns to support the Ottomans and even establishing a newspaper to bolster their political position.[4] In recognition of his efforts, and to encourage

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[1] Ibid., p.29 ff, p.38 ff.
[2] Ibid., p.35, p.73.
[3] Ibid., pp.35, 66.
[4] Ibid., p.53 ff.

him to do more, Abdulhamid awarded Herzl a medal.[1] Meanwhile, Herzl persisted in promoting the idea of a Jewish state, each time easing and conceding some of his demands. He even suggested to the Sultan that he personally take charge of the Zionist movement and announce that he would offer Palestine as a province under his complete sovereignty, in exchange for an annual payment of one million pounds.[2]

Looking at Herzl's attempt, the Sultan successfully exploited Herzl and his efforts, while Herzl gained nothing from Abdulhamid.

Abdulhamid persisted in his efforts to prevent Jewish settlement in Palestine. In 1897, he established a special committee in Jerusalem to oversee the enforcement of restrictions on Jewish entry into the country. In June 1898, he issued instructions forbidding foreign Jews from entering Palestine unless they paid a security deposit and pledged to leave within a month. The Sultan further tightened airport regulations, granting no exemptions, not even for the British vice-consul in Antioch, solely because he was Jewish. These restrictions were subsequently enforced with even greater rigor. In 1901, the Sultan issued a law regulating Jewish visits to Jerusalem, requiring them to carry a travel pass detailing their journey and its duration. This pass had to be exchanged for a temporary residence permit, marked with a special color, valid for no more than three months in Palestine. Violators of this regulation were dealt with firmly and decisively. In 1904, the law prohibiting the sale of land to Jews of all nationalities was reinstated. In 1906, the Sultan rejected Herzl's proposal for the Hebrew University. That same year, Abdulhamid removed Rashid Pasha, the governor of Jerusalem, following repeated complaints about his lenient policies toward Jews, replacing him with Ali Ahmad Bey. Bey made significant efforts to combat Jewish immigration and to develop Jerusalem, standing firm against pressures from those benefiting from the migration, whether

[1] Ibid., pp.45-46.
[2] Ibid., pp.28, 33, 34, 38, 45, 52, 55, 66, 73.

foreign agents or corrupt officials. In September 1907, the Sultan issued an order prohibiting the transfer of state land ownership to Ottoman Jews, which obstructed the efforts of foreign banks to buy Palestinian land. Toward the end of his reign in 1908, he appointed his secretaries as governors of Jerusalem to maintain direct oversight of the situation through his inner circle.[1]

However, Abdulhamid's efforts did not yield the desired results. On the contrary, the Jewish population in Palestine grew during his reign,[2] due to several factors, the most significant of which were: widespread administrative corruption in the later years of the Ottoman Empire, foreign pressures and the influence of consuls, and the collaboration of these foreign powers and their consuls in issuing documents to Jews or granting them foreign protection, as previously mentioned. The Ottoman Empire, in its weakened state, was plagued by the ailments of a dying empire. Its ability to resist foreign pressures was diminished, as was its capacity to reform its administrative system and renew it with capable personnel.

Additionally, the natural population growth among Jews and their regular movement within Ottoman territories contributed to the overall increase. Despite the occupation of Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and other lands during Abdulhamid's reign, the Ottoman Empire neither acknowledged nor accepted these occupations. As a result, Jewish pilgrims and visitors from these regions were not barred from entering, and some instances of travel that began as pilgrimage or visits ultimately led to settlement.

From a numerical perspective alone, one might conclude that Abdulhamid and the Ottomans failed to prevent Jewish migration; some might even suggest they facilitated it. However, if one considers the percentage of Jews who managed to settle in Palestine relative to the larger waves of Jewish migration from

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[1] Abd al-Aziz Awad, vol.3, pp.164-65; Orhan Muhammad Ali, pp,215-16; Naela al-Waʿari, p.202 ff; M. Shaʾban Sawwān, *al-Sultān wa al-Tārikh* (The Sultan and History), p.303 ff.

[2] See Awad, pp.158-59; al-Waʿari, pp.206-07.

Russia, often driven by foreign plots (estimated not to exceed 25% at the highest), one could argue that Abdulhamid and the Ottomans succeeded in limiting Jewish migration and in safeguarding Palestine.

Overall, considering all these intertwined factors, figures, and perspectives,[1] it becomes clear that Sultan Abdulhamid II served as a significant barrier to the establishment of any Jewish state. Herzl frequently voiced his frustration in his diaries, feeling that Abdulhamid had deceived and used him without granting him anything in return.[2] At one point, Herzl even offered three million francs unconditionally to demonstrate the goodwill of both him and the Zionist movement toward the Ottoman Empire. This offer angered the Sultan, who rejected the funds and cut off further contact.[3] Herzl then proposed establishing a Jewish university in Jerusalem free of charge, framing it as a modern institution under Ottoman control that would bring in the best Jewish professors from elite Western universities. This, he argued, would prevent Ottoman youth from needing to travel to the West, where they might be exposed to foreign influences or drawn toward opposition to the Sultan. However, the Sultan also rejected this proposal.

In the end, toward the close of his life, Herzl considered a plan to bomb the Yıldız Palace to either assassinate or detain the Sultan, hoping to clear the path for a Turkish government that might agree to grant Palestine to the Jews. However, fear of the plan's possible failure held him back.[4] Abdulhamid was eventually overthrown in 1909, a coup he believed was largely due to his opposition to Jewish migration to Palestine. He had anticipated that Zionist goals would advance if he lost the throne, and indeed, this is what occurred.

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[1] About these factors and perspectives, see M. Shaban Sawwan, *al-Sultān wa al-Tarīkh*, p.320 ff.
[2] See *Herzl's Diaries*, p.211.
[3] Ibid, p.211 ff.
[4] Ibid., p.356 ff.

With Abdulhamid's fall, the doors to Jewish migration opened wider. Scholars have concisely described the difference between Abdulhamid's stance and those of his successors.[1] While Abdulhamid's positions were principled and strategic, occasionally making tactical concessions under pressure, his successors were driven more by opportunism than principle. They showed leniency toward Zionist migration but would impose restrictions temporarily and tactically whenever they perceived an immediate threat.[2]

The Zionist Movement After Herzl's Death

Herzl passed away in 1904 at the age of forty-four. Despite his brief life, he secured his place in history for centuries, having sown the seeds of a long-held dream that had gone unrealized for three thousand years. He anticipated that the first Zionist Congress would be the starting point of a future state, one that would come into existence within five years, or fifty at most. His prediction proved correct, as the state emerged fifty years later. In his diaries, he wrote that the foundation of a state "rests on the people's will to create one, but equally on the will of a single individual with enough strength to bring it into reality."[3]

After Herzl's death, the Zionist movement encountered a period of confusion and instability, under leaders who lacked his level of intelligence and dynamism, including David Wolffsohn (1905-1911) and Otto Warburg (1911-1920). However, the movement regained its momentum and strength when Chaim Weizmann, a powerful figure, assumed leadership in 1920. Weizmann proved to be as capable and resilient as Herzl, steering the Zionist vision to realization within his lifetime and ultimately becoming the first president of the State of Israel after its establishment.

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[1] See Awni Farsakh, *al-Tahaddī wa al-Istijābah fī al-Sirāʿ al-ʿArabī al-Suhyūnī: Judhūr al-Sirāʿ wa Qawānīnih al-Dābitah (1799-1949)*, p.223.

[2] Also, see George Antonius, *Yaqazat al-ʾArab*, p.365; El-Messiri, vol.6, pp.43-44.

[3] *Herzl's Diaries*, p.89.

This turmoil and confusion that plagued the Zionist movement serves as one of the strongest pieces of evidence that the movement itself lacked the strength to succeed in such a monumental project as establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Its success was primarily the result of support from European imperial powers. How could a movement, whose progress had effectively stalled for sixteen years after the death of its founder, resume such an ambitious project as the establishment of a homeland?

However, acknowledging this fact does not diminish the immense effort Chaim Weizmann exerted. Just as Zionism could not establish a homeland purely through its own strength, Western colonialism itself cannot breathe life into a lifeless body or revive an inert, lazy entity! While it may appear that Weizmann was just as determined and ambitious as Herzl, he was much more fortunate, as the circumstances and prevailing winds were in his favor. The most significant of these circumstances was the weakening of the Ottoman Empire—starting with the coup against Sultan Abdulhamid and his deposition in 1909, followed by the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I (1914-1918). British forces then occupied Palestine and Iraq, gaining control over Transjordan, which removed the major obstacle to the establishment of Israel and introduced a strong supporter to champion this cause.

For this reason, the Zionist movement's strategy has shifted. During the reign of the astute Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Herzl categorically rejected the idea of allowing Jews to infiltrate and appear as illegal immigrants, as this would make it easier to expel them and complicate efforts to attract more migrants. However, after the Sultan's deposition, the Eighth Zionist Congress in The Hague in 1907 decided to support a plan for the slow, continued infiltration of Jews, organizing and managing it so that Zionism could establish a presence that would exert pressure on the Ottoman Empire and seek international protection. This

approach was reaffirmed by the Ninth Zionist Congress in Hamburg in 1909 and the Tenth Congress in Basel in 1911.[1]

[1] Abd al-Aziz Awad, p.262; El-Messiri, vol.6, p.323.

Conditions in Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period

Historians frequently highlight the conditions in Palestine during the late Ottoman period to counter Herzl's claim and Zionist propaganda that portrays Palestine as "a land without a people." Our aim here, however, is not to refute these assertions but to explore the factors that made the region vulnerable to occupation. Thus, instead of focusing on the signs of civilization, development, and culture present in Palestine at that time, we will examine the weaknesses within the land and its people that contributed to this outcome.

The State of the Ottoman Empire: "Absence of Resistance"

The historian Ibn al-Athir explained the swift spread of the Mongols across Islamic lands and the collapse of these territories before them by stating: "Their success was due to the absence of resistance. This absence arose because Khwarazm Shah Muhammad had seized control of the lands, killed their kings, and eliminated them, leaving himself as the sole ruler over all the territories. So, when he was defeated, there was no one left in these lands to resist or protect them."[1]

This astute observation deserves to be regarded as a key theory in political and historical studies. When a state, ruler, or sultan centralizes power, concentrating authority in their own hands while diminishing the strength of surrounding forces, the entire system becomes dependent on their leadership. Consequently, if they are defeated, die, or encounter misfortune, the entire structure collapses. This scenario offers one of the clearest explanations for the condition of the Ottoman Empire in its final years.

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[1] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol.10, p.335.

During its decline, the Ottoman Empire embarked on a process of "modernization," a Western, secular model of governance and administration that concentrated power in the hands of the ruling authority, distancing it from society. Gradually, and often unwittingly, the Ottoman state moved away from the Islamic system that had been based on a "balance of powers." This shift mirrored Ibn Khaldun's theory that conquered peoples tend to emulate their conquerors. However, this modernization did not have the strengthening effect that the Ottomans had hoped for. Despite adopting the European model, the Ottomans continued to face defeats throughout the 19th century. This is because Europe's rise was not solely the result of modernization, and the decline of the Ottomans cannot be attributed simply to their failure to modernize.

What concerns us here is the growing centralization and monopolization of power within the Ottoman state, as it expanded its bureaucratic apparatus to encompass all remaining territories under its rule, including Palestine. This vast and intrusive bureaucracy, deeply woven into the fabric of society, progressively eroded social cohesion, weakened local sources of strength, and diminished the capacity for self-reliance. As a result, society's ability to independently manage its affairs and restore order in the face of chaos or corruption within the Ottoman administration was significantly undermined.

Moreover, the decline of the Ottoman Empire opened the door for significant foreign influence from Western powers and Russia, particularly through their support of Christian and Jewish minorities, which strengthened their influence and privileges. This dynamic played a key role in the rise of Arab nationalism, led by Arab Christians in the Levant, alongside the emergence of Turkish nationalism. These Islamic regions, influenced by the nationalist ideologies spreading in the West, saw the rise of passionate movements advocating for Arab independence in Arab territories and the Turkification of Arabs within the Ottoman government.

The situation had, therefore, changed from what it had been before. In the late Ottoman period, anyone born in Palestine, like most Arabs at the time, had no doubt or hesitation in identifying as Ottoman. It was their identity, their bond, and their sense of belonging. Even if their roots were Arab, they would encounter, in the streets, neighborhoods, and schools, another boy of Turkish origin, who often had an Arabic name. This Turkish boy did not see himself as merely Turkish, but also as Ottoman. The two students would unite in their study of geography or history, or when singing the anthems that praised the Ottoman Empire and its victories.[1]

The rift had now emerged, and its crisis was deepened by the turmoil that followed the deposition of Abdulhamid and the Ottoman entry into World War I. It was a time marked by intense suspicion, during which Turkish nationalism solidified as a dominant force, particularly evident during the era of the Committee of Union and Progress. This period saw the rise of a secular Turkish military regime that pursued policies of Turkification in the Levant, enforced strict control over the Arab provinces, and swiftly implemented punitive measures. It was a bitter era, epitomized by Jamal Pasha's harsh governance in the Levant.

On the other hand, the idea of Arab nationalism had evolved significantly. It was no longer merely a call made by a few Christians in the Levant; the British had now become involved, enticing Sharif Hussein—the Sharif of Mecca and ruler of the Hijaz—with the promise of an Arab caliphate, with him at its helm.[2] Intriguingly, this caliphate was intended to be limited to the Arab territories under Ottoman control, which is why its slogan was "From Rafah to Taurus,"[3] not "from the Atlantic to the Gulf." It was a "caliphate" designed along the lines of "Western

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1 Ahmad al- Shuqeiri, *al-A'mal al-Kamilah*, vol.3, p.719 ff.

2 See the exchanged letters between Sharif Hussein and McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, in: File of Palestine Documents, vol.1, p.169 and beyond.

3 Shuqeiri, vol.3, p.727.

occupation." More than just an idea, it had now become a dangerous reality, as Sharif Hussein and his Arab forces rebelled, opening a new front against the Ottomans at a critical moment when they were already stretched thin in World War I.

Here began a cycle of interconnected issues, each amplifying the other and escalating tensions: errors, missteps, and even ordinary policies and actions were swiftly framed as expressions of either Arab or Turkish nationalism, prompting a counter-response fueled by nationalist sentiments in turn.

When the Ottoman Empire was defeated in World War I, society was left in a state that epitomized Ibn al-Athir's concept of "the absence of resistance." By that point, society had already lost much of its self-reliance. Many of its members had perished in the war—either conscripted into the defeated Ottoman army, or joining Sharif Hussein's forces, whose public slogans called for rebellion against the Committee of Union and Progress and the restoration of the oppressed Ottoman Muslim caliph. Others scattered, fleeing the horrors of war, famine, and the tragedies of displacement.

As such, in Palestine, only the most fundamental forms of social cohesion remained: the bonds of family, tribe, and clan. Within these groups, it was mainly the wealthy—those who had established themselves in the cities and maintained ties with the Ottoman administrative apparatus—who stood out. These individuals were often the ones who prioritized, or rather could afford, sending their children to study in major capitals such as Istanbul, Cairo, London, and Paris, striving to preserve their social standing.[1]

Thus, when the British entered Palestine, they found a society in this fragmented state. The remaining elites and prominent figures were open to engagement through various means: either by tempting them with promises to safeguard their social positions, privileges, and influence; by invoking the Arab nationalist

[1] Rashid Khalidi, p.35.

sentiment the British were actively supporting at the time; or through the appeal of progress and the Western model of modernization, which had captivated some of these elites and their sons who had studied abroad. These incentives were counterbalanced by the stark reality of a lack of means to oppose the British presence. What could a small, resource-poor population do against a mighty empire that has just emerged victorious over the world's great powers?

A nationalist Arab leader from Acre recounted hearing elders nostalgically refer to the Ottoman era as "the days of prosperity and dignity."[1] Even those who, under British rule, came to view the Ottoman period as an occupation still lamented the lost unity of the Arab lands, as Arab unity had been a reality under Ottoman rule—even if "under occupation." But with the arrival of the British and French, this unity dissolved, replaced by both occupation and fragmentation, and the banner of Arab unity was no more.[2]

Islamic civilization set an unparalleled example in its fair and compassionate treatment of minorities, integrating them and protecting their rights in a way unmatched by any other civilization in history.[3] Some who view history through a materialistic or non-Islamic lens might argue that Muslims, in their generosity and tolerance toward non-Muslim minorities, unwittingly laid the groundwork for their own decline. In time, these minorities turned against them, delivering a profound blow to the unity and strength of the nation and its civilization.

Nevertheless, we do not hold that view. Rather, we believe that if we could turn back time, we would once again embrace

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[1] Shuqeiri, vol.3, p.722.

[2] Ibid., vol.3, p.739. See also Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, *Fī Khidam al-Nidāl al-ʿArabī al-Filistīnī*, p.19.

[3] When the Jewish historian Shahin Makarios reviewed the history of the Jews, he acknowledged that the Jews found in the Muslim world a level of acceptance they did not experience under any other nation. He noted only two incidents of persecution throughout the Islamic eras—and even these two instances are subjects of debate and discussion. See Shahin Makarios, pp. 65-66, 70, 72.

minorities with the utmost goodwill as our religion commands. The root of the issues lay in straying from our principles by assigning minorities to sensitive positions and placing full trust in them, despite knowing—as God cautions in Surah Al-Imran,

﴿يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَتَّخِذُواْ بِطَانَةً مِّن دُونِكُمۡ لَا يَأۡلُونَكُمۡ خَبَالٗا وَدُّواْ مَا عَنِتُّمۡ قَدۡ بَدَتِ ٱلۡبَغۡضَآءُ مِنۡ أَفۡوَٰهِهِمۡ وَمَا تُخۡفِي صُدُورُهُمۡ أَكۡبَرُۚ﴾

﴿O you who have believed, do not take as intimates those other than yourselves, for they will not spare you [any] ruin. They wish you would have hardship. Hatred has already appeared from their mouths, and what their breasts conceal is greater.﴾ [3:118]. Additionally, it was military and political weakness that rendered our nation vulnerable to both internal and external threats. Even a noble nation becomes an easy target when it is weak. Strength is the best safeguard for morals; as the saying goes, firmness is the fence around justice, and misplaced mercy is merely a form of weakness.

The painful story of Zionism is, in essence, the tale of how Judaism and Protestant Crusader mentality turned against the Islamic world— a world that had, for centuries, provided sanctuary and protection to these groups, particularly during times when they faced the threat of annihilation. They found safety and refuge in Muslim lands at moments when Muslims, had they chosen to, could have eradicated them with no external power to intervene or defend them.

Numerous Jewish and Protestant historians have attested to this, too vast to cover in full here. However, a few key examples, particularly concerning the relationship between Jews, Protestants, and the Ottoman Empire, are worth noting. One such example comes from the Israeli Jewish historian Michael Winter, who remarked, "Although the Ottoman Empire was a conservative Sunni Islamic state, it was also an enlightened one. The Sultan's balanced view of his subjects, combined with doctrinal and scientific perspectives, significantly improved the situation for

Jews throughout the empire. During the Ottoman period, especially for Jews working in the Treasury Department, they reached heights they had never known before, or at least not since the Fatimid era in the Middle Ages."[1] Consequently, the Ottoman Empire became a "sanctuary of religious freedom"[2] for Jews who had been expelled from Catholic Spain and Portugal in the 15th and 16th centuries, as well as those persecuted and expelled from the Russian Empire and Eastern Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. Furthermore, the American Jewish historian Salo W. Baron, regarded as "the greatest Jewish historian of the 20th century," testified that "the most prosperous centers of Jewish communities, from the rise of the caliphate to the abolition of the Jewish ghettos in Europe, were in the Islamic lands: in Iraq under Abbasid rule, in Spain during the Berber period, and later in the Ottoman Empire."[3]

The Protestants, originally a breakaway faction from the Western Catholic Church, experienced a history fraught with massacres, persecution, and brutal wars. In their time of need, they found sanctuary only in the Ottoman Empire. The British Protestant historian Thomas Arnold notes that the Ottoman treatment of Christian subjects, "exhibits a toleration such as was at that time quite unknown in the rest of Europe. The Calvinists of Hungary and Transylvania, and the Unitarians of the latter country, long preferred to submit to the Turks rather than fall into the hands of the fanatical house of Hapsburg; and the Protestants of Silesia looked with longing eyes towards Türkiye and would gladly have purchased religious freedom at the price of submission to the Muslim rule. It was to Türkiye that the persecuted Spanish Jews fled for refuge in enormous numbers at the end of the fifteenth century, and the Cossacks who belonged to the sect of

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[1] Michael Winter, *Jewish Relations with the Sultan and Non-Jewish Society*, in *History of the Jews in Egypt during the Ottoman Period*, by Yaqub Landra, translated by Jamal Ahmed al-Rifaï and Ahmed Abdel-Latif Hamad. Cairo: Supreme Council of Culture, 2000, p. 472.

[2] Carl Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic People*. 5th Arabic Ed., pp.489-90.

[3] Hamilton Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*. 1st Arabic Ed., vol.2, p.310.

the Old Believers and were persecuted by the Russian state church, found in the dominions of the Sultan the toleration which their Christian brethren denied them."[1]

The Jews and Christians in Palestine lived much as they did in other parts of the Islamic world, particularly in Egypt and the Levant, since these regions were often governed by the same authority throughout Islamic history. As a result, the Jews and Christians in Palestine did not face any unique or distinct challenges during that time.

This situation only began to change when the Ottoman Empire weakened, and European powers started to intervene under the guise of protecting minorities. The competition primarily centered on Christian minorities, with Russia focusing on the Orthodox, and France on the Catholics and Maronites. The Jews, however, remained largely overlooked until the rise of Zionism in Britain, following the dominance of Protestantism there—as previously mentioned. The British saw the Jews as a minority they could leverage, much as other competing powers had relied on their own minorities. Amid the Ottoman resistance and the failure of Western initiatives, the situation of the Jewish minority did not undergo significant change within the broader imperial context. Even by the late 19th century, Jews had no distinct issue or crisis in the Ottoman Empire. In fact, they were described as "not rebelling, not stirring unrest, not complaining or suffering, but instead praising the (Ottoman) state day and night, in both good times and bad, constantly expressing gratitude for its protection and care. This was because no European state claimed to defend them."[2]

Even the waves of Jewish migration that intensified following the Russian persecution of Jews in 1881, resulting in an increased Jewish presence in Palestine, had limited impact. Most of these migrants were impoverished refugees, their lives characterized by hardship and difficult conditions. They relied heavily on donations

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[1] Thomas Walker Arnold, *Preaching of Islam*, p.134.

[2] Mustafa Kamil Pasha, *al-Masʾalah al-Sharqiyah* (The Eastern Question), p.8.

and financial assistance from wealthy Jews,[1] lacking the resources to drive any significant change on their own. Furthermore, their circumstances did not indicate that they could pose any substantial threat independently.

A common occurrence was that many Jews who arrived in Palestine during successive waves of migration ultimately left in search of better opportunities in Europe, America, or other places.[2] For many, faith in the "Promised Land" was either absent or insufficient to encourage them to remain. However, some did stay, either motivated by their beliefs or because they found ways to improve their living conditions by participating in projects financed by the Zionist movement and wealthy Jewish benefactors during this period.

This wave of migration heightened Arab awareness of the Zionist movement's aims. Arab and Islamic newspapers took an active role in raising public awareness, with prominent publications such as *Filastin*, *Al-Karmil*, and *Al-Manar* magazine highlighting the issue. The migration also led to instances of conflict, including a clash in 1886 between Palestinian farmers and Jewish settlers.

The first notable shift in the status of Jews occurred following the 1909 overthrow and removal of Sultan Abdulhamid II. This event plunged the Ottoman Empire into a cycle of upheaval, frequent government turnovers, and coups, opening the door to risks on multiple fronts, including:

1. The appointment of several Jews to high-ranking government positions during this period.

2. An acute need for funds, prompting dealings with the Zionist movement, which offered financial support in return for lifting restrictions on Jewish immigration. This led to the sale of some state-owned lands in Palestine.

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[1] Michael Oren, p.306.

[2] El-Messiri, vol.7, pp.99-91.

3. The pervasive instability caused by constant government changes in the capital, which facilitated increased land acquisitions and allowed for greater exploitation of legal loopholes.

4. A sustained wave of Jewish emigration from Russia, following its defeat by Japan and the resulting political unrest.[1]

Amid the turmoil, Jews in Palestine made another decisive move by establishing an armed Jewish guard for their settlements in 1909, marking the foundation of what would become the Zionist army. Two years later, in 1911, they formally requested that Hebrew be recognized as an official language.

However, the Jews' support for the Allies in World War I against the Ottoman Empire, then under Unionist rule, prompted the Ottomans to turn against them. Information had reached Jamal Pasha, the Ottoman commander in Syria, regarding a Zionist plot to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. In response, he launched a wide-reaching campaign against Jewish institutions, seizing their assets, disarming settlement guards, and banning the display of the Jewish flag or any Hebrew signs.[2]

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire then followed, ending its rule over Syria after World War I. This marked the close of one era and the beginning of another.[3]

Those Jews who lived in Muslim lands enjoyed a prosperity they had not found elsewhere; yet, when they sensed an opportunity to turn on those who had honored and sheltered them, they did not hesitate. However, this story also reveals the greatness of our nation and the nobility of its character. Even in its weakest moments, the Ottoman Empire sought a solution to protect the Jews from persecution and violence, while ensuring they did not become a threat. However, they chose instead to

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[1] Abd al-Aziz Awad, vol.3, 169 ff; El-Messiri, vol.7, p.90.

[2] Arif al-Arif, *al-Mufassal fi Tarikh al-Quds*, vol.1, p.547.

[3] Dr. Abd al-Aziz Awad briefly reviewed the stages of Jewish settlement in Palestine from the time of Muhammad Ali's entry into Syria until the end of the Ottoman era, in a study published in the *Egyptian Historical Journal*, Issue 21, p. 253 and onward.

become a threat and serve as an ally to Western powers in the Empire's disintegration.

Zionist settlers were consistently offered the opportunity to acquire Ottoman citizenship and settle in Palestine as Ottomans, rather than as a colonial presence backed by foreign powers. The issue was not merely about thousands of stateless Jews or those seeking refuge from oppression; it was about the establishment of a foreign population that would evolve into a Western-oriented, colonial settler state—one that ultimately rejected the offered solution.[1]

When reading history, it is essential to distinguish between the native Jews who lived under the Ottoman Empire and those who came from abroad. The former posed far less harm and threat; in fact, many of them feared Zionism and the establishment of Israel.[2] Over time, however, they became integrated into the dominant movement, adopting its aims and objectives, and thereby became a part of it. In doing so, they turned against their Islamic civilization and betrayed the Muslims who had long honored them. Although their involvement in this great transgression is undeniable, it remains less significant than that of the foreign settlers.

It is also important to remember that there were Jews,even among the Zionist immigrants, who enjoyed security and respect from Arabs, even during the peak of later conflicts. The simple reason for this was their ability to coexist and interact with their Arab surroundings with respect and good character.[3]

[1] El-Messiri, vol.6, p.43; Roger Garaudy, *The Mythical Foundations of Israeli Policy*, pp.29-30.
[2] See Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, pp.16, 28; Rashid Khalidi, p.48.
[3] *The Autobiography of Ariel Sharon*, Arabic edition, p.20; Roger Garaudy, pp.29-30.

The Period of British Occupation

International rivalries and competing interests among Britain, France, and Russia helped prolong the Ottoman Empire's existence. While the Ottoman Empire continued to weaken, these powers were often at odds and hesitant to engage in a costly war to divide its legacy, which allowed the empire to endure a bit longer. Sultan Abdulhamid II, from his weakened position, tried to navigate these rivalries, hoping that a major conflict among them might offer a chance for the Ottoman Empire's revival. However, these powers postponed their conflicts and instead settled them at his expense, resulting in a gradual erosion of the empire during his reign. The anticipated war only erupted five years after he was deposed.

World War I and Its Consequences

While World War I was fundamentally a European conflict with little initial involvement from the Ottomans, its impact would inevitably extend to Ottoman-occupied territories, such as Egypt and North Africa, and its consequences would affect the unoccupied regions: the Levant, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, the Caucasus, and Anatolia. As a result, it became crucial for the Ottomans to assess the positions of the major powers. Sources indicate that the Allied forces were intent on dismantling the Ottoman Empire after the war and refused to provide any guarantees or agreements that would protect Ottoman lands. Faced with this uncertainty, the Ottomans were forced to ally with Germany and the Axis powers.[1]

The war concluded, after many lengthy chapters, with the defeat of the Axis powers, including the Ottoman Empire, which lost Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. However, what is of particular

[1] Shakib Arslan, *An Autobiography*, p.99 ff, p.187.

importance to us here is what transpired in the Levant, specifically in Palestine.

During World War I, the British made three key promises: one to the Arabs, one to the Jews, and an agreement with France, as follows:

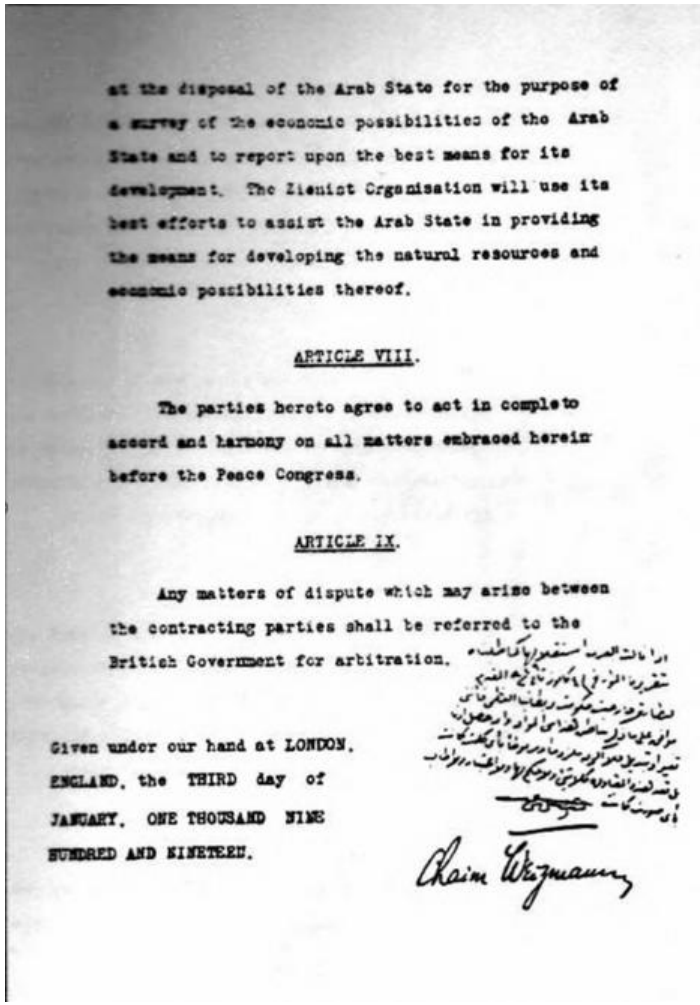
1. Britain promised Sharif Hussein bin Ali, the ruler of the Hijaz, that he would become the Arab caliph of a vast state that would include the Levant, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula. A strong alliance formed between the two parties, with Sharif Hussein and his sons, Faisal and Abdullah, becoming some of the British Empire's most loyal supporters. In return, they would fight the Ottoman forces in the Hijaz and the Levant. Sharif Hussein fully embraced this betrayal, delivering a significant blow to the Ottomans during their most vulnerable period.[1] Additionally, the British secured Faisal's approval of the Balfour Declaration and the facilitation of Jewish immigration through the Faisal-Weizmann Agreement (signed with Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann) on January 3, 1919. In this agreement, Faisal agreed to forgo Palestine in exchange for an Arab state to be ruled by his father and brothers.

When the dust settled, the British betrayal became clear: Hussein lost the Hijaz to Abdulaziz Al Saud and was exiled to Cyprus, receiving nothing in return. However, the British appointed his son Abdullah as the ruler of a desert territory that would later be known as "Jordan," while Faisal was made the king of Syria. When a dispute arose between France and Britain over the division of Syria and Iraq, the two powers agreed that France would control Syria, while Britain would take Palestine. After France occupied Syria, Britain moved Faisal to Iraq, making him its king.

What is significant here is that the Kingdom of Jordan was essentially a regime created by the British for one of their most

[1] For a brief explanation of the important role played by Sharif Hussein's forces in supporting the British and defeating the Ottomans, see: Liddell Hart, *Strategy and Its History in the World*, translated by Haytham Al-Ayyoubi, 4th ed., Beirut: Dar Al-Talĭa, 2000, p. 179 and onwards.

loyal agents, Abdullah bin Hussein. This regime would play a critical role in the Palestinian issue from that point onward and continues to do so to this day.



at the disposal of the Arab State for the purpose of a survey of the economic possibilities of the Arab State and to report upon the best means for its development. The Zionist Organisation will use its best efforts to assist the Arab State in providing the means for developing the natural resources and economic possibilities thereof.

ARTICLE VIII.

The parties hereto agree to act in complete accord and harmony on all matters embraced herein before the Peace Congress.

ARTICLE IX.

Any matters of dispute which may arise between the contracting parties shall be referred to the British Government for arbitration.

Given under our hand at LONDON, ENGLAND, the THIRD day of JANUARY, ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND NINETEEN.

Chaim Weizmann

It is important to note that the prevailing opinion in Palestine, before these bitter outcomes unfolded, was that the Ottoman Caliphate was the legitimate authority, and Sharif Hussein was seen as someone who had broken away from Islam and defied the Ottoman Caliph, Sultan Mehmet V Rashad.[1]

2. The British Foreign Secretary, Balfour, issued his famous declaration promising the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. The text of the declaration read,

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

The declaration treated Palestine as a land without a people or owner, with its inhabitants considered merely "non-Jewish communities" residing there. This promise was further endorsed by U.S. President Wilson (on August 31, 1918) in a similar letter to American Zionist leader Rabbi Stephen Wise.[2] Wilson also reaffirmed this in his message to the Paris Peace Conference, where he encouraged Jews to return to Palestine and promised that the League of Nations would recognize a Jewish state once it was established.[3]

The practical significance of the Balfour Declaration lies in its being the most substantial success of Zionist efforts. A major global power not only adopted their demands but also championed their cause, effectively providing the Zionist project with the backing of a great power, rather than merely that of a Jewish organization. Furthermore, the declaration strengthened the Zionist movement against internal Jewish critics who had doubted its objectives or even its ability to realize the promised dream. It

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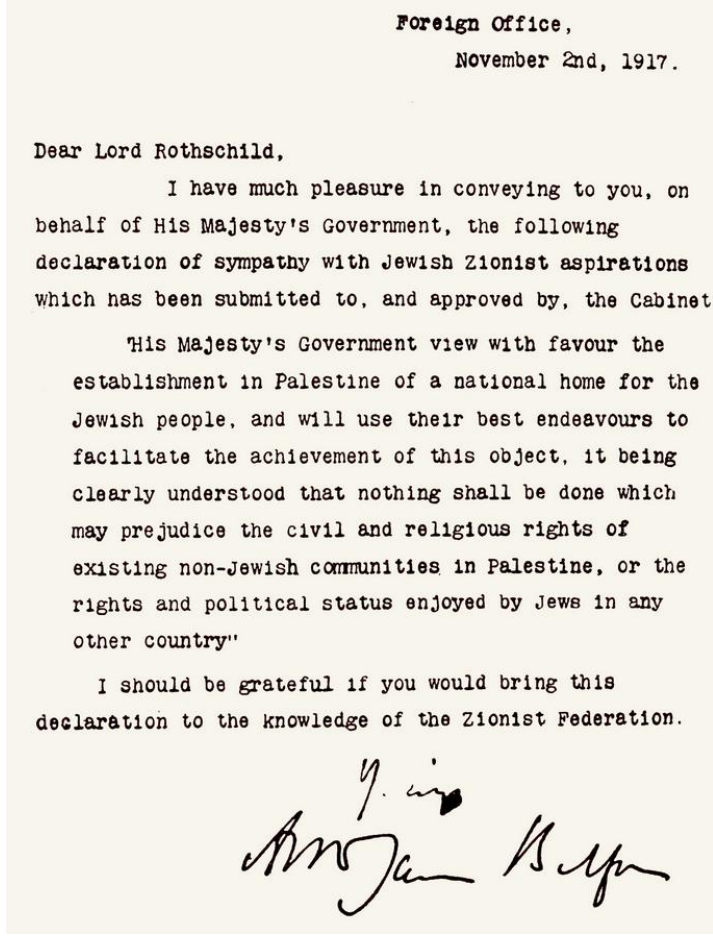
[1] Ahmad al-Shuqeiri, vol.3, p.722.
[2] Regina Sharif, p.127.
[3] Ibid., p.129.

would draw additional Jewish support and funds to the cause, and, perhaps most importantly, it would encourage many Jews to immigrate to Palestine, now under the protection of a global power.



Foreign Office,
November 2nd, 1917.

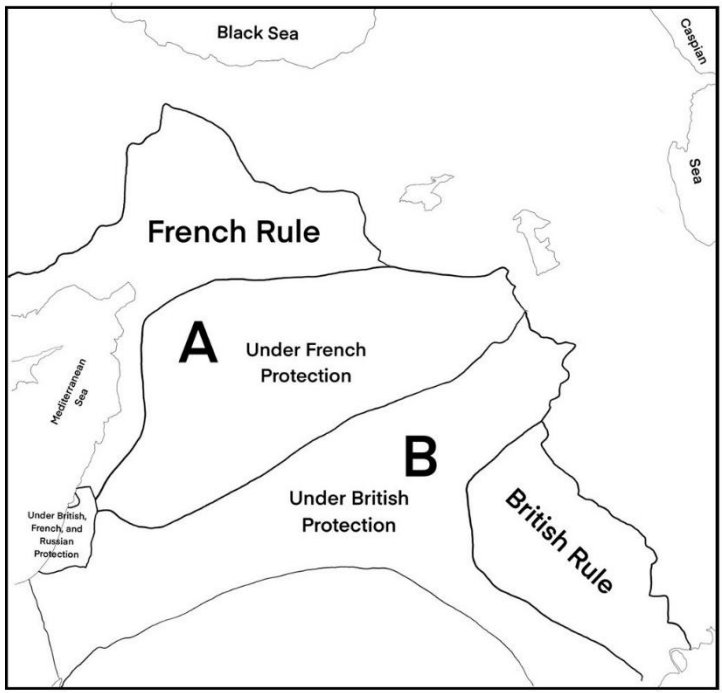
Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

3. Britain and France reached an agreement to divide the territories of the Levant, Iraq, eastern Arabia, and eastern Anatolia, which they inherited from the Ottomans, in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Named after its signatories, British diplomat Mark Sykes and French diplomat François Georges-Picot, the agreement outlined the partition of the Levant and Iraq, with the northern part of present-day Palestine, including Jerusalem, placed under international mandate. However, the British ultimately took direct



Sykes-Picot Agreement

May 1916

control of Palestine, violating the terms of the agreement. At the same time, France seized Damascus and placed Syria under its direct control. As a result, Britain moved King Faisal bin Hussein to Iraq, and the modern borders of the region were largely established, dividing the Levant into four states: Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine.

It is evident that, of the three promises made, only one was fulfilled: the Balfour Declaration, while British political maneuvering rendered the other two null. The greatest victim of this betrayal was Sharif Hussein, who quickly paid the price for his treachery, ending up in exile in Cyprus. He even confessed that he could not afford the rent for the house he was assigned. His story serves as a striking example of betrayal. Despite his intense longing for a throne, Hussein repeatedly recognized that the British were deceiving him. Yet, he never took a moment to reflect or protect himself. Instead, he placed his entire future in British hands, trusting them completely—an unquestioning faith that ultimately led to his downfall.

None of this would have been possible, however, without Britain's victory in the war and the subsequent entry of its armies into Jerusalem.

The Occupation of Palestine and Jerusalem

The conquest of Jerusalem was no easy task, but Britain had a clear military advantage and a strategically vital position, having occupied Egypt since 1882. Over these decades, Britain gained control of Egypt's resources, which enabled it to mobilize both human and financial resources to strengthen its military position. More than half a million Egyptians were enlisted into British forces,[1] and they fought alongside Britain's troops against the Ottoman army and various Islamic uprisings in regions such as Darfur, Libya, and beyond. However, what concerns us now was the situation on the Palestinian front.

The Suez Canal was the linchpin of the British colonial network—a critical waterway initially constructed under the rule of

[1] For more on the Egyptian peasants who were forced into conscription in the British army and their tragic conditions, see: Mohamed Abul-Ghar, *The Egyptian Legion: The Crime of Kidnapping Half a Million Egyptians*, 1st Arabic edition, Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, 2022. Research on this topic primarily relies on the study by American historian Kyle Anderson, *The Egyptian Labor Corps*. Its Arabic translation was recently published in Cairo by the National Center for Translation, 2023.

the Muhammad Ali dynasty. This canal marked a severe breach in Arab and Islamic security, providing Britain with a vital, direct route to transport troops and resources from India in the east to the Atlantic in the west. Recognizing its strategic importance, the Ottomans aimed to regain control over the canal, while the British were determined to defend it and keep the Ottomans at a distance. This led to intense clashes near Gaza, culminating in the "Three Battles of Gaza." The Ottomans emerged victorious in the first two battles, forcing the British to replace their commander, Murray, with one of their most skilled generals, Edmund Allenby, who ultimately secured a British victory in the third Battle of Gaza, thereby opening the Palestinian front.

Egyptian forces integrated into the British army were instrumental in this campaign that led to the loss of Palestine. Their contributions extended beyond combat, with Egyptian engineers and laborers constructing essential infrastructure to transport fresh water and supplies across the arid Sinai Desert to support British troops. This critical logistical support enabled the British to sustain their campaign and succeed in the third Battle of Gaza.

On December 17, 1917, British General Allenby entered Jerusalem, prompting a British newspaper headline to proclaim, "The Crusades are now over." British forces continued their northward advance, occupying the rest of Palestine and disregarding their previous agreement with the French, completing the occupation by 1918.

Many analyses have tried to explain Britain's strong support for the Zionist project. This question is often examined by historians in light of Britain's later forced withdrawal from the region. At the time, however, this support was not surprising. Colonial powers had an entrenched drive for control, expansion, and dominance. Britain saw a unique opportunity: the Ottoman Empire was weakened and nearing collapse, there was fierce competition from other powers (notably Russia, Germany, and France), the region's strategic location held immense importance and religious significance, and there were ideological affinities between

Protestantism and Judaism. Together, these factors made the pursuit of influence and control in Palestine an essential part of Britain's colonial ambitions. When Britain embarked on establishing a Jewish state, it certainly did not foresee withdrawing from the land, as would ultimately happen thirty years later. Rather, Britain envisioned the Jewish state remaining under British sovereignty, akin to the arrangements in Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan, where British forces maintained a military presence and held ultimate authority, while local governments managed daily administration and projected a veneer of national autonomy for the public.

The British Preparation for Israel

The first Jewish military unit entered Palestine alongside the British army, with British support paving the way. Chaim Weizmann visited Jerusalem, not as an investor as he had in the past, but now as the leader of the Zionist project, swiftly initiating efforts to advance its goals. By 1919, he had established the foundation of a Zionist intelligence network, aimed at collecting detailed information on the land, its inhabitants, land acquisition prospects, potential sources of resistance, and more. In this way, the security and military structure of the future Zionist state began to take shape, a full thirty years before the state's official declaration.

Two years before British forces entered Jerusalem, a Zionist minister in the British government authored a 1915 report, concluding that conditions were not yet ripe for establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. He argued instead for an initial period of British occupation to prepare the way, writing: "Whatever the merits or flaws of that proposal (the establishment of a Jewish state), it is certain that the time has not yet come for it... Any premature attempt to realize the dream of a Jewish state could set back its actual establishment by many centuries. The

leaders of the Zionist movement fully understand these considerations."[1]

Herbert Samuel, appointed by Britain as the High Commissioner of Palestine in 1920, systematically laid the groundwork for a Jewish state, effectively becoming the architect of Israel through the following measures:

1. Encouraging Jewish immigration to Palestine by abolishing Ottoman restrictions that had previously curbed it.

2. Dissolving the Ottoman Agricultural Bank, which had provided accessible loans to Arab farmers, and establishing the Jewish Loans and Mortgages Bank. This shift allowed the Jewish bank to dominate agricultural capital, leading Arab farmers to gradually lose land due to compounding debt.[2]

3. Permitting Jews to arm themselves and form a separate military force.

4. Allowing the establishment of an independent Jewish educational system.

5. Recognizing Hebrew as an official language.

6. Seizing state and communal lands, along with other government-controlled properties, and transferring them to Jewish ownership.

7. Enacting laws to claim communal lands, government lands, and properties without documented ownership, while easing the process for Jews to acquire land. These laws ultimately facilitated extensive land transfers to Jewish ownership.[3]

All these actions were legitimized politically and internationally through the Mandate Charter,[4] which Britain used as the basis for

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[1] See *Malaff Wathaïq Filistīn*, vol.1, pp.159-60.
[2] M. Shaban Sawwan, p.334.
[3] Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, p.29.
[4] The term "mandate" is a deceptive colonial euphemism that disguises the true nature of occupation. It implies that the major powers and emerging nations "appointed" Britain to rule over a people, with the task of educating, training, and civilizing them until they were capable of self-rule. In this way, occupation=

its policies in Palestine. This charter included the core principles of the Balfour Declaration, with Article II obligating Britain to prepare conditions in Palestine for a Jewish state. This mandate received international approval from over twenty countries in the League of Nations, the global organization established after World War I.

British rule thus became a catalyst for the growth of a foreign Jewish community, facilitating its financial, social, and political presence at the expense of Palestinian society—the rightful landowners. The mandate's fourth clause further established the "Jewish Agency" to cooperate with the British occupation, laying the groundwork for the eventual creation of a Jewish state. This was the political seed of the Zionist entity, which would represent the Jews, oversee their affairs, and build the institutions of the future state. The agency was even granted the authority to represent Jews internationally, well before the establishment of the state itself. Consequently, the Jewish Agency evolved into a governing power within the British mandate, gradually growing into a parallel and independent authority.

In this manner, Britain carried out the contradictory promises of the Balfour Declaration. While attempting to establish a homeland for the Jews, it directly violated the terms of the declaration that called for the protection of the rights of the non-Jewish population. Although tasked with fostering institutions, Britain restricted this development to Jewish institutions, hindering the emergence or growth of any Palestinian institutions, even though Palestinians made up 92% of the population at the time.

By 1925, just five years later, the Jewish population and their settlements had increased, and their institutions and administrative

=and subjugation were portrayed as a noble, humanitarian mission. Ironically, the very occupier that claimed to help this nation advance used the opportunity to establish a new state on its land, bringing in immigrants from all corners of the world while displacing and expelling the indigenous population, leaving the country vulnerable to foreign settlers.

structures began to emerge as distinct entities, separate from those representing the Palestinian population:

1. Establishment of autonomous governance for Tel Aviv.

2. Formation of a labor union, led by Ben-Gurion himself.

3. The Hebrew University was inaugurated in a grand ceremony attended by notable figures, including British Prime Minister Lloyd George, British military governor Allenby, Balfour, Churchill, Chaim Weizmann, and Herbert Samuel.

The organized military strength of the Jewish community became evident during the 1929 uprising, when Palestinians were taken by surprise by armed Jewish formations with structured ranks and military organization. The British administration governing Palestine incorporated Jewish and Christian elements into its ranks, leaving Muslims as a minority both in number and status compared to Jews and Christians. This military administration empowered and relied upon minority groups, reshaping the social dynamics within Palestine.

Between 1930 and 1935, over 150,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine, effectively doubling the Jewish population. Most were German, including a substantial number of wealthy businesspeople, and the smuggling of weapons to Jewish communities increased considerably.

In 1935, Zionist factories were exporting diamonds and cotton from Palestine. This year also marked the peak of a major wave of Jewish immigration from Germany, bringing in over sixty thousand new immigrants.

Through twenty years of concerted effort, the Jewish community strengthened its numbers through immigration, acquired arms with British support, and gained expertise through military training. Their influence grew to the point where they established pseudo-"Islamic" and "national" organizations aimed at undermining genuine Islamic nationalist groups, sowing discord, and fueling division and crises.

The security apparatus had developed a comprehensive profile of members within Islamic organizations in Palestine, identifying those who could be approached, those who could be bribed, and those for whom elimination was deemed necessary. This agency, which would later be known as the Mossad, even established a division to train Arab Jews as spies to infiltrate their own communities in Arab countries.[1]

By the late 1930s, as World War II erupted, fifteen thousand Jews enlisted with the Allied forces. This involvement afforded them extensive training, weapons proficiency, and advanced military knowledge, far surpassing anything available to the Palestinians. During this period, the Haganah evolved into a formalized army, complete with its own fleet of aircraft.

The war also triggered an additional wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine, particularly from Germany and Europe, where Jews suffered Nazi persecution. Some Zionist leaders endorsed this persecution as a means to motivate Jewish migration to Palestine.[2] Ben-Gurion himself remarked, "If I had to choose between rescuing all Jewish children in Germany by sending them to England or saving only half by sending them to Israel, I would choose the latter."[3]

In parallel with these military initiatives, intelligence efforts focused on compiling a "village file"—a detailed and comprehensive record on every Palestinian village.

In 1939, a serious rift developed between the Zionists and their British patrons. The British had been striving to suppress the Great Palestinian Revolt, which had lasted for three years (1936-1939), and with the onset of World War II, pacifying Palestine became an urgent priority. This effort culminated in the issuance of the "White Paper," a policy that pledged to end Jewish immigration. The Zionists vehemently opposed this measure as it threatened

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1 *The Memoire of Amin al-Hussieni*, p.69; El-Messiri, *Rihlati al-Fikriyah* (*My Intellectual Journey*), p.478.
2 Regina Sharif, pp.13-14, 168; Roger Garaudy, p.87 ff; Rashid Khalidi, p.66.
3 Garaudy, pp.87-88.

their plans for establishing a state, particularly with the war displacing more Jews from Europe, especially Germany, where they endured severe persecution later known as the Holocaust.

Ben-Gurion navigated this conflict with Britain astutely, summed up in the well-known statement: "David Ben-Gurion committed to aiding the British army in the fight against fascism as if the White Paper did not exist, while opposing the White Paper's terms as if the war had not begun."

Although Jewish militias had fought alongside the British in World War II, some of the more radical factions split from the Haganah, forming militias like the Irgun in 1937. From Irgun, an even more extreme faction broke away in 1940, known as the Stern Gang, led by its Polish founder, Yair Stern. These splinter groups soon turned against the British, whom they now saw as an obstacle to their statehood ambitions and sought to push them out of Palestine. The Stern Gang, in particular, escalated its hostility toward the British, even attempting contact with Nazi Germany—despite its persecution of Jews—in hopes of collaborating to undermine British interests in Palestine. Stern believed the British posed the greater threat to the vision of a Jewish state, especially with the White Paper policy, which restricted Jewish immigration and proposed a partition of Palestine, including a state for Arabs.

Although Stern's attempt to ally with the Nazis failed, he continued his attacks on the British until he was eventually tracked down and killed. Nonetheless, both Irgun and the Stern Gang intensified their assaults on British targets. One of the most notable acts was the assassination of Lord Moyne, the highest-ranking British official in the Middle East, in Cairo on November 6, 1944, due to his support for the White Paper policy.

At the end of World War II, the situation in Palestine was dire on all levels:

1. Internationally: The Allied victory over the Axis powers, in whom Arabs and Palestinians had placed their hopes, cleared the way for the Zionist state project to proceed without political hindrance.

2. Domestically: Zionist influence on the ground was growing at a rapid pace:

- The Haganah militias had evolved into a formal army, equipped with the military training, weapons, and equipment acquired from their participation in the war alongside Britain.

- Jewish immigration surged dramatically, with over 90,000 Jews arriving in Palestine during the war and more than 60,000 in the years that followed. Zionist forces had seized 270,000 dunams of land and established 73 new settlements.

- The Zionist security apparatus was completing a comprehensive strategy for Palestinian villages, gathering detailed data on each village's land type, population, economy, political affiliations, and the logistical challenges of occupying it. They expanded their network of informants, intensifying surveillance on Palestinian society and its remaining centers of influence. They also set up "Islamic nationalist" organizations designed to compete with genuine institutions, sow discord, and divert public attention.

One of the most significant outcomes of World War II was the waning influence of Britain and France, giving way to the ascendant powers of the United States and the Soviet Union. The Zionist movement quickly recognized this shift, transferring its primary focus and support from Britain to the United States in 1942, thus continuing its established strategy of aligning with global powers to pursue its goals. At that time, the U.S. was inheriting British and French influence in the East and was working to dismantle what it termed "old colonialism," replacing it with a new form of indirect control. Consequently, the U.S. began promoting ideals such as the liberation of nations, the right to self-determination, and similar principles.

This was not mere rhetoric, however. Zionist militias, including the Haganah, began launching direct attacks on British targets, installations, and personnel. The Haganah, though officially separate, had secretly cooperated with the more radical Irgun and Stern Gang, a partnership that culminated in the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem on July 22, 1946.

The hotel, which housed the British military and civil administration in Palestine, became the site of a devastating attack that claimed the lives of over ninety people. The operation was triggered by British authorities obtaining documents implicating the Haganah in anti-British military actions.[1] This attack proved to be a decisive turning point, signaling to the British that the Zionists had fully turned against them and were now aligned with the rising American power, which aimed to inherit the influence, status, and resources of the "old colonial powers."

From that point onward, Zionism adopted the guise of a liberation movement, claiming to fight for the expulsion of the British occupiers from the homeland! This narrative became a rallying cry for Zionists worldwide, aligning with the dominant ideologies between 1948 and 1970, which emphasized people's rights and self-determination. These ideas were championed by both the United States and the Soviet Union, not out of genuine concern for peoples' welfare, but as part of their respective geopolitical agendas to undermine British and French influence.

Britain, claiming it could no longer resolve the situation in Palestine, referred the matter to the newly-formed United Nations—an institution established by the victorious powers of World War II to oversee global governance. This move marked a pivotal moment in the Palestinian issue, following Britain's initial steps toward establishing a Jewish state.

From 1918 to 1948, during the period of British occupation, the Jewish population in Palestine increased thirteenfold. In 1918, there were about 50,000 Jews, constituting 8% of the population. By 1948, their numbers had surged to 650,000. In contrast, Palestinians owned 98.5% of the land in 1918, but by 1948, Jews controlled 60% of it.

While Theodor Herzl is often regarded as the father of Zionism for planting the initial seed of the movement, we must not overlook the pivotal roles played by those who followed him—

[1] See Menachem Begin, *The Revolt*, p.p.289-295.

particularly Chaim Weizmann, Herbert Samuel, and David Ben-Gurion. This influential trio worked tirelessly to shape both international and internal conditions to facilitate the establishment of a Zionist state. Simultaneously, they ensured that Israel would not be wholly reliant on Western political shifts but would instead build its own military, economic, and security independence, positioning its self-sufficiency as a crucial element in the political landscape. Despite their efforts to rally popular and religious support among Jews, their primary focus was on creating the conditions that would make the state's formation inevitable. By the time the declaration of Israel came, the state had already become a fait accompli.

This was the Zionist-British perspective of the story, while Palestinian society was weaving its own parallel and intertwined narrative, as follows:

The Situation of Palestinian Society Under British Occupation

The Palestinians were profoundly shaken by the British occupation of their land. Having already endured immense suffering during World War I, many Palestinians had been conscripted to fight alongside the Ottoman Empire on various fronts. The battles with the Allied forces caused widespread destruction across Palestinian cities, and a severe famine ravaged the country, leading to the deaths of countless people. Gaza was among the hardest-hit areas, having witnessed three major battles between the British and the Ottomans, and extensive areas had been decimated by British bombardment.[1]

When the Ottomans were defeated in World War I, the people of the land found themselves, for the first time in six centuries, under foreign occupation. Since the Mamluk era, when the Crusaders were driven from the shores of the Levant, no foreign power had established a presence in these lands. The people of this

[1] Rashid Khalidi, p.42.

region had known only the Islamic Caliphate, with the Ottomans representing its final form for four centuries.

A few years after the war, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk rose to power in Türkiye, declaring the abolition of the Caliphate and reducing the vast Ottoman Empire to the borders of modern-day Türkiye. He proclaimed Türkiye as an independent homeland, severing all ties with the other lands once governed by the Ottomans. This left the people of Palestine in an unprecedented and bewildering situation. For fourteen centuries, since the region came under Islamic rule, it had always been part of a vast Islamic Caliphate or a significant Islamic state under the Caliphate. It had never existed as an independent entity. How could it now be both independent and simultaneously under foreign occupation, with no one to take responsibility for its defense or liberation?

This situation created an intense intellectual and psychological upheaval. Until then, the people of Palestine had not identified themselves explicitly as "Palestinians"; this term held little meaning as an identity marker. Instead, people identified themselves by their family, city, religion, or as part of the larger Ottoman *millet* (nation). But now, a new concept was taking shape—a novel idea and emerging identity: Palestine. From this point forward, "Palestine" began to hold a unique significance, not merely as a geographic region but as a distinct homeland, separate from others, under foreign occupation, embodying a collective identity for its people.[1] It became a homeland seeking a path to liberation and self-determination.

Nationalist ideas began to permeate Palestinian society through several key channels:

1. The Expansion of Education: The spread of schools established by missionary organizations and foreign missions led to an increase in educated individuals. In response, the Ottoman state founded its own schools to retain influence over its citizens,[2] though even these schools were influenced by the rising nationalist

[1] Rashid Khalidi, pp.51-52.
[2] Ibid., p.34.

sentiments of the time. Education levels were also on the rise in neighboring countries like Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, where nationalism was a dominant theme shaping curricula, news outlets, literature, and cultural narratives. These ideas began to resonate strongly among the growing educated class, which was gaining social influence.

2. Nationalism as a Byproduct of Foreign Occupation: Foreign occupation itself fostered nationalist ideas, as occupying powers tend to introduce their ideologies into the countries they controlled, using both coercion and inducement. Just like occupiers reorganize societal structures to align with their interests, people under occupation often begin to adopt elements of the occupier's worldview. This can create a tendency among the oppressed to emulate the dominant power, and nationalist ideas circulated widely, especially among those classes more closely connected to the occupation.

3. The Collapse of Islamic Authority: With the defeat of the Islamic Caliphate and its subsequent abolition by Mustafa Kemal, a major shift occurred. Defeated ideologies often face rejection, and societies tend to gravitate toward the prevailing ideas of those in power. This contributed to a decline in adherence to Islamic thought and an increased attraction to nationalist ideologies.[1] Even influential religious and legal leaders, including scholars and judges, began adopting the secular ideas gaining ground at the time.[2]

4. Absence of Regional Support for Palestinian Defense: Regional leaders no longer saw the defense of Palestine as their responsibility. Meanwhile, the occupying power, rooted in a European nationalist and ethnic identity, was actively promoting a national identity within Palestine itself—specifically, a Jewish state. This, combined with an international system built on nationalism through the League of Nations, made nationalism a natural recourse for resisting the occupier and seeking independence. Palestinians and other colonized nations turned to the principles

[1] Ahmad al-Shuqieri, vol.3, p.723.
[2] See, Khalidi, pp.52-53.

of liberation, national independence, and the right to self-determination—principles that were publicly endorsed by the American president and widely embraced by colonized peoples. Through these ideals, many tried to negotiate independence from their occupiers in the global conferences that followed World War I.

Due to these factors, along with several lesser influences, nationalist ideas began to take hold among the people, who would gradually come to be known as the "Palestinian people." This emerging identity took root—and indeed, needed to—in the face of the dual pressures from British and Zionist occupation. From the very beginning, the Palestinian people, in this modern nationalist sense, found themselves in a continuous struggle to assert their existence, affirm their right to their land, and seek freedom from British rule and the existential threat posed by Zionism.

This does not imply that Palestinians abandoned their Islamic identity and affiliations. Throughout all periods of struggle and resistance, the Islamic presence remained predominant, with the sanctity of Islam serving as the primary force in arousing emotions, mobilizing efforts, and drawing support from beyond Palestine's borders. Rather, the point here is that these various factors collectively steered the political landscape of what was feasible and attainable toward a nationalist and patriotic framework. As a result, much of the political and media discourse shifted in this direction, focusing on the liberation of a national state: Palestine.

One of the British mandate's primary objectives, since Herbert Samuel, was to prevent the Palestinians from forming a state or political entity that could represent them. British policy, backed by its military forces, actively opposed the creation of any representative council for the Palestinians, as demanded by the 1928 Arab Congress in Jerusalem—since such a council would have had an overwhelming Arab majority. Moreover, British policy sought to stifle the rise of any leadership capable of representing

the Palestinians and to suppress any movement that could lead to the formation of a Palestinian political force.

Thus, British policy pursued two contradictory objectives simultaneously: facilitating, supporting, and nurturing the establishment of a Jewish state devoid of the essential elements of statehood, while actively preventing the creation of a Palestinian state with all the necessary attributes of sovereignty. This exceptional and anomalous situation was unique to Palestine. In contrast, in other Arab countries under British occupation, the British approach was to install client regimes, as evidenced in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and elsewhere.

One consequence of this policy was the intensification of rivalry and conflict among influential Palestinian families, such as the Husseinis and the Nashashibis. Haj Amin al-Husseini, who had emerged as the primary Palestinian political leader, was pursued by the British authorities and sought refuge in Al-Aqsa Mosque. To arrest him, the British deployed a "Muslim" Indian battalion to storm the mosque, but al-Husseini managed to escape Palestine, launching his resistance efforts from abroad. This separation between political leadership and on-the-ground activities significantly weakened the movement's cohesion.

At the same time, secular nationalist and leftist communist ideologies began to spread among the Palestinian elite and the socially rising, educated youth. This influx of foreign, modernist ideas fractured the unity of Palestinian society, creating divisions between its longstanding Islamic identity and the new ideologies, thereby disrupting its internal harmony.

Furthermore, the educated youth were advancing socially by taking positions within the administrative institutions set up and supervised by the occupying forces to manage the daily affairs of the Palestinian population. This emerging class of employees was tasked with tax collection and reinforcing the administrative reach of the occupiers. Their involvement was not driven by intent or loyalty to the occupiers but rather by necessity, as these roles represented one of the few viable career paths for graduates.

Employment in these institutions also provided a route for social mobility—a natural aspiration for middle- and lower-class individuals,[1] and even a means of preserving the upper classes' social and economic standing within society.

Palestinian society thus found itself under foreign occupation, facing an influx of Western ideas and a dominant system that structured pathways for education, financial advancement, and social mobility. Together, these influences undermined the formation and unity of a cohesive resistance movement.

The British occupation also deliberately fostered and exploited religious divisions among Muslims, Christians, and Jews.[2] Although Christian and Jewish minorities initially held reservations about the incoming occupation, the course of events, along with the prevailing power dynamics and sustained policies, gradually drew many Jews into alignment with the Zionist project, while Christians increasingly turned to British protection. Christian opponents of colonialism had hoped to promote a secular, nationalist Arab identity instead of an Islamic one—an approach that struggled to gain traction in a predominantly Muslim society. Moreover, British favoritism towards the Christian minority, marked by the gradual allocation of high-ranking positions and exclusive privileges, further reduced resistance to the occupation. Only a small contingent, driven by a shared Arab identity and an acute awareness of the dangers posed by occupation, maintained their opposition.[3]

It is both natural and expected for an occupying force to sow discord, incite conflicts, and heighten tensions between Palestinians and Jews in pursuit of its political goals. This strategy persisted throughout the entire duration of the British mandate.[4]

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[1] Bahjat Abū Gharbieh, pp.34, 43.
[2] Abu Gharbieh, pp.12, 16.
[3] Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, vol.2, p.914.
[4] See for example, Abu Gharbieh, p.16; Salah Khalaf, *Filistīnī bi lā Hawiyah* (*A Palestinian without Identity*), p.31.

Despite the political turbulence, many Arab sources recount a history of coexistence between Muslims and Jews, particularly among local populations and Jews of Arab heritage. This coexistence was especially noticeable in major commercial cities, where social interactions and tolerance often unfolded independently of the broader political landscape. The everyday dynamics were characterized by a natural harmony; one young man from Jaffa even remarked that it was "not uncommon" for Palestinian men to fall in love with Jewish women, and marriages with Jewish women were not rare.[1] This social fabric, however, began to fray in the years preceding the Nakba, as political tensions escalated, bringing a heightened sense of fear and uncertainty.

Understanding the circumstances in which Palestinian society existed provides valuable insight into the nature of the resistance it generated, the obstacles it confronted, and helps set more realistic expectations of its potential outcomes.

Resistance in Palestine

Given the conditions in which Palestinian society lived, the forms of resistance can be divided into two categories: first, **peaceful political and legal resistance**, and second, **armed, violent, or illegal resistance** (as defined by British law, of course).

Peaceful political and legal resistance sought to harness British political principles, laws, and slogans in support of the Palestinian cause and to benefit the Palestinian people. Its aim was to pressure the British into adhering to their own proclaimed values, using methods such as public shaming, denunciation, and other tactics permitted under British rule. This form of resistance is often adopted by the weak—those who have yet to gain the strength to directly confront their oppressors. In this case, it reflects a society that had lost the Islamic power that once protected it, now continuously drained under the occupation of a global superpower.

Although peaceful political and legal resistance is not a path to liberation or independence, it becomes a necessary recourse when

[1] Salah Khalaf, pp. 23-24.

alternative means of strength are unavailable. The occupation's entrenched nature, coupled with the West's overwhelming power and its prolonged duration, led some segments of society to embrace this peaceful approach, especially when it aligned with their personal interests. In such an environment, the occupiers, with their manipulative political strategy, co-opted local elites and wealthy figures to serve their interests. These individuals were granted privileges and positions that allowed them to pacify and control the population.[1] This phenomenon, referred to by some researchers as "tame nationalism,"[2] saw these elites competing to demonstrate their ability to appease the occupiers and suppress popular dissent. Meanwhile, they also vied for favor among the people by presenting themselves as capable of securing concessions from the occupiers without resorting to costly and high-risk confrontations.

It is crucial to note that such individuals cannot be easily dismissed as traitors. The circumstances were complex and layered, blending weakness, vulnerability, and conflicting interests between national welfare and personal or familial gain. Some were simply naive or misled, while others aligned themselves fully with the occupation. Certain figures began as duped collaborators but later became steadfast proponents of resistance, while others started by resisting only to be gradually co-opted or coerced by promises and threats, ultimately aligning with the occupation's interests. Therefore, assessing these leaders and individuals must be approached on a case-by-case basis grounded in careful, nuanced investigation.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that the region's fragmentation severely weakened Arab leadership. The collapse of the Ottoman framework, which once offered broader national ties,

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[1] See: Fathi al-Shaqaqi, *Rihlat al-Dam al-Ladhī Hazam al-Saif*, (*The Complete Works: The Journey of Blood That Defeated the Sword*), vol., p,176.

[2] The Palestinian poet and scholar Tamim Barghouti wrote a doctoral thesis with this title, focusing on the Egyptian political class under British occupation. However, the description is equally applicable to all occupied countries during the colonial era.

left leaders isolated within narrow, national boundaries.[1] This isolation constrained their capabilities, limiting their potential to resist, challenge, and mount significant opposition.

The most notable expressions of this peaceful resistance took shape through a series of Arab conferences, whose primary objectives included annulling the Balfour Declaration, stopping Jewish immigration, halting the sale of land to Jews, and establishing a legislative council representing Palestinians, ultimately aiming for a Palestinian government. This series of conferences began with the First Congress in 1919 in Jerusalem, where delegates condemned the partitioning of Greater Syria and asserted that Palestine was part of a united Syria under Arab rule.[2] However, the overwhelming strength of the colonial powers, combined with the submission of Sharif Hussein's sons—Faisal and Abdullah—to foreign authority and their acceptance of appointed positions in Iraq and Jordan, rendered these demands ineffective.

The conferences continued, with seven held by 1928 under the leadership of Musa Kazem al-Husseini, who served as the foremost Palestinian political leader until his death in 1934. To diminish his influence, the British created the roles of Mufti of Jerusalem and Head of the Islamic Council, appointing his cousin, Amin al-Husseini, to these positions. This decision sparked some tensions and divisions.[3] Although Amin al-Husseini initially adopted a conciliatory stance toward the British, he soon emerged as the undisputed leader of the Palestinian resistance, working vigorously to counter British occupation.

A point seldom highlighted in historical studies authored by nationalists and Arabists is that this resistance—both peaceful and

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[1] Abu Gharbieh, p.30.

[2] See *Palestine Document File*, vol.1, pp.263-64. It should be noted here that this was not simply the desire of isolated politicians, as may be the case today, but rather the prevailing sentiment among the public at that time, also echoed by the press. Also, see Ahmad Shuqeiri, vol.3, p.729 and beyond, and p.745; Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, p. 30; Rashid Khalidi, p. 56.

[3] Khalidi, p.69.

militant—was largely shaped by an Islamic character. The leading figure of the era was the Mufti, Haj Amin al-Husseini, who, while backed by the strength of the al-Husseini family, relied even more on his religious authority and influence over Islamic endowments, Sharia courts, judges, imams, and preachers. Supporting these were the teachers of Quranic schools, who, much like contemporary schools, were deeply rooted in village life. The Mufti's religious stature also extended his influence well beyond Palestine, whether with political leaders or Islamic scholars and movement leaders across the region.[1] As a result, the Mufti's party and its platform enjoyed widespread public support. Opposing factions, such as the Nashashibi family and its supporters, struggled to match his influence through family ties alone.[2]

Peaceful resistance effort also encompassed various methods, including diplomatic visits to London, organizing protests, issuing petitions, and making appeals—actions typical of peaceful resistance movements.[3] While these efforts sometimes achieved limited success in specific circumstances, they did not substantially change the trajectory of the conflict.[4] However, this path of peaceful resistance suffered two major setbacks. The first was the unsuccessful visit by Musa Kazem al-Husseini and the Arab delegation to London in 1930. The second was British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald's letter to Chaim Weizmann in February 1931, often referred to as the "Black Letter," which reiterated Britain's commitment to supporting Zionism. This letter effectively nullified Britain's prior pledge from October 1930, where it had agreed to restrict Jewish immigration based on a British expert's recommendation that no more land was available in Palestine for additional Jewish settlers.[5]

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[1] See the memoir of Amin al-Husseini, which highlights the extensive network of his relationships across the Arab and Islamic world.
[2] Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, pp.31-32.
[3] See example of these protests and petitions in *Palestine's Documents File*, vol.1, p.263 ff.
[4] Abu Gharbieh, p.13; Khalidi, pp.54, 67.
[5] Muhsin Saleh, *al-Qadiyah al-Filistiniyah* (*The Palestinian Problem*), p.48.

Peaceful initiatives continued, as even those committed to armed resistance could not openly declare it. They required peaceful activities to mask their movements, identify supporters, rally Arab and Muslim sentiment, and secure funds or initiate actions. In 1931, the General Islamic Congress was held in Jerusalem, hailed as "the largest Islamic gathering of the modern era."[1] It attracted prominent Islamic leaders such as Rashid Rida, Muhammad Iqbal, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Thaʿalibi from Tunisia, and Shaukat Ali from India. The congress issued resolutions to establish an Islamic university, form a company to safeguard Palestinian lands, and create Palestine committees in every country.[2]

In 1935, the Palestinian Scholars' Conference convened and issued a fatwa prohibiting the sale of land to Jews, condemning those who participated in such transactions.[3]

The heavy British presence also played a significant role in controlling political dynamics, with the power to elevate or suppress leaders, grant diplomatic recognition, or revoke it at will. Britain often exploited these powers to undermine Palestinian unity and political representation through close affiliates, whether they were deceived or actively complicit. This strategy was used repeatedly throughout the period of occupation to destabilize any semblance of unified resistance.[4]

Regarding armed resistance, despite the immense hardships faced by Palestinians under British rule, they persisted in resisting with all the strength they could muster within their challenging circumstances. A steady series of Palestinian uprisings emerged, primarily targeting Jewish settlers while avoiding direct clashes with British forces. This strategic choice aimed to prevent engagement with the more powerful British military, hoping instead to pressure Britain into reconsidering its pro-Zionist stance.

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[1] Shuqeiri, vol.3, p.750.
[2] Muhsin Saleh, p.48-49.
[3] *Al-Mawsūah al-Filistīniyah* (*The Palestinian Encyclopedia*), part II, vol.2, p.1035.
[4] See Khalidi, p.98.

Key examples of these uprisings include the unrest in Jerusalem in 1920, Jaffa in 1921, the Buraq Uprising in 1929, and further protests in Jerusalem and Jaffa in 1933. These were largely Islamic-led revolts, and while the casualty rates between Arabs and Jews were comparable, there was a significant difference: Jews were killed by Arabs using rudimentary weapons such as sticks and knives, whereas Arabs were primarily killed by the British using firearms.[1]

As was often the case, small armed movements emerged but were swiftly suppressed and dismantled. One notable example is the Green Hand movement, led by Ahmad Tafesh, which formed during the Buraq Uprising but ended with Tafesh's arrest in February 1930.[2] Unlike earlier movements that focused primarily on Jewish targets while avoiding direct confrontation with the British, this movement shifted its approach to targeting both groups. A prevailing sentiment emerged that the British were the root cause, with the Jewish presence seen as a secondary effect—like the shadow of a tree that would vanish if the tree itself were cut down. This perspective gained traction between 1930 and 1935, a period characterized by heightened Jewish immigration and increased militarization.

These early sparks of resistance culminated in what became the largest uprising of its era—the revolt led by Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam. In 1935, al-Qassam consulted with Palestinian leaders about launching a rebellion against the British, but they cautioned that the public was not yet ready, the timing was poor, and there remained hope for achieving rights through dialogue and negotiation.[3] Undeterred, al-Qassam proceeded with the revolt, ultimately becoming one of its first martyrs on November 20, 1935, during an initial skirmish with British forces.

The exact number of members in al-Qassam's organization remains unknown, with estimates ranging from 200 to 800.

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[1] Abu Gharbieh, p.13 ff; Mushin Saleh, p.46.
[2] Saleh, p.50.
[3] Fathi al-Shaqaqi, vol.1, pp.186-87.

Similarly, the group's exact founding date is unclear—a common challenge in documenting secretive resistance movements, especially when their early leaders become martyrs. However, it is believed to have been established between 1925 and 1930. Operating primarily in northern Palestine, where Jewish settlements were expanding, the group targeted Jewish settlers, the British, and their spies and collaborators. The organization followed a decentralized, cell-based structure, where each member knew only the four members of their own small unit. After al-Qassam's martyrdom, leadership was passed to Farhan al-Sa'di.[1]

The decision to launch the revolt was accelerated by the discovery in Haifa that the boxes arriving at Jewish shops did not contain goods or fabrics, but rather weapons and ammunition.[2] Religious figures increasingly came to dominate al-Qassam's movement, and of the forty key members, thirty-six held the title "Sheikh."[3] Al-Qassam received no support from any Arab government, and his death is attributed to the complicity of Arab collaborators with the British authorities.[4] Even the prominent leaders of Palestinian society, who embodied the model of "acceptable nationalism," refrained from attending the martyr's funeral for fear of British retaliation against their property.[5]

In Jerusalem, another armed group emerged led by Abd al-Qader al-Husseini, known as "The Holy Jihad," which received support from the political leader Haj Amin al-Husseini. By 1935, the group was estimated to have around 400 members.[6]

The martyrdom of al-Qassam sparked the largest uprising in Palestinian history under British occupation, known as the Palestinian Revolt or the Great Palestinian Revolution. The revolt was triggered by an operation carried out by al-Qassam's followers,

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[1] Muhsin Saleh, p.51.
[2] Mustafa al-SibaĬ, *Jihādunā fi Filistīn* (*Our Struggle in Palestine*), p.6; Abu Gharbieh, pp.43-44.
[3] Fathi Shiqaqi, vol.1, 182.
[4] Salah Khalaf, p.64.
[5] Fathi Shiqaqi, vol.1, pp.178, 189.
[6] Muhsin Saleh, p.51

led by Farhan al-Sa'di, in which two Jews were killed on April 15, 1936. This set off a chain of retaliatory actions, leading to a general strike declared by Palestinians on April 20, 1936. The strike lasted for six months, becoming a major aspect of the revolution, and is remembered as the longest general strike in Palestinian history. Some researchers even consider it "the longest strike in history carried out by an entire nation."[1]

Although al-Qassam did not live to see the outcomes of his efforts, Palestine witnessed their realization after his martyrdom. The men from al-Qassam's organization became key figures in the Great Revolt, alongside other leaders who emerged from the revolution, including regional and tribal figures as well as skilled individuals. Together, they formed the military backbone of the uprising.

On the political front, leadership quickly took shape in the early days of the revolt. On April 25, 1936, the Palestinian Arab political factions unified under the "Higher Arab Committee," led by Haj Amin al-Husseini. The committee set forth three core demands for the general strike:

1. The establishment of a Palestinian government accountable to an elected parliament.

2. The cessation of Jewish immigration.

3. The cessation of land sales to Jews.

Let us first focus on the political course of the revolution, and then look at its military and field progression. Britain was shocked by this sudden development and the widespread eruption of the revolution. In response, it resorted to using violence and political pressure to force the Palestinians to end the strike, which had been both surprising and difficult for them to contain due to its spread, expansion, and prolonged duration. Britain instructed the Arab

[1] Ibid., p.52.

rulers under its influence to intervene and pressure the Higher Arab Committee to end the strike,[1] which ultimately occurred.

Britain responded by pledging to send a high-level commission to assess the situation, known as the Peel Commission. This combined approach of pressure, incentives, and Britain's severe military actions led the Palestinians to end the strike, hoping to create space for potential Arab and British diplomatic solutions. However, the Arab leaders offered no concrete support, and the British commission took an entire year to release its report in July 1937. The report ultimately recommended partitioning Palestine between Arabs and Jews—marking the first formal proposal to displace and dispossess the Palestinian people from their homeland.

This result appeared primarily as a tactic to buy time and pacify the revolt. Although Jews owned only five percent of the land at the time, the commission proposed allocating them a third of northern Palestine, with two-thirds in the south for the Arabs, and designating the corridor from Jerusalem to Haifa as a British-administered area. This political arrangement, a new gain for the Jews secured through British policy, was insufficient for them, and—as was often the case—they did not stop there.

This fueled Palestinian anger and reignited their revolution. In response, Britain dissolved the Higher Arab Committee and arrested its leaders, exiling four of them to the Seychelles. The committee's leader, Haj Amin al-Husseini, managed to escape capture and fled to Lebanon in October 1937, from where he continued to support and direct the revolution from abroad.[2]

The revolution's military and field operations targeted not only Zionists and the British but also collaborators and spies. Key

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[1] The message reads, "We urge you to seek peace in order to prevent further bloodshed, trusting in the good intentions of our friend, the British government... Rest assured, we will continue our efforts to assist you." This message was signed by King Abdulaziz Al Saud (Saudi Arabia), Prince Abdullah bin Hussein (Jordan), King Ghazi (Iraq), and Imam Yahya Hamid al-Din (Yemen), as noted in Amin al-Husseini's memoirs, pp. 26-27.

[2] Amin al-Hussieni, p.29 ff.

actions included attacks on British government offices and infrastructure, as well as on Jewish settlements. The revolutionaries also focused on eliminating high-ranking officials and pressuring Arab police officers who cooperated with the British. Among the most significant operations was the assassination of British governor Lewis Andrews on July 26, 1937, shortly after the Peel Commission proposed partitioning Palestine between Arabs and Jews. The revolt continued to escalate, reaching a high point in the summer of 1938, when rebels managed to gain control over nearly all rural Palestine and even took several cities from British control, albeit temporarily.[1]

As in many Islamic resistance movements, Muslim volunteers from Egypt, Jordan, the Levant, and Iraq joined the revolution.[2] Some rose to leadership positions, including figures like Fawzi al-Qawuqji.

In each popular uprising, British forces responded with intense brutality to crush resistance, employing a wide array of oppressive tactics including killings, assassinations, mass arrests, exile, and trials. These harsh actions were bolstered by intelligence operations and political strategies aimed at fragmenting Palestinian leadership and undermining the movement by stirring sectarian and religious discord.[3] The Great Palestinian Revolt bore the brunt of the full British repressive apparatus. Their approach was systematic: they targeted field leaders for assassination, severed political leaders from on-ground operations through exile or facilitated escapes from Palestine, and rigorously disarmed civilians. Homes were demolished if even a single spent bullet was found, and civilians were used as human shields, tied to the fronts of British vehicles and trains to deter ambushes.[4]

Determined to end the three-year revolt, Britain deployed 20,000 troops, led by four seasoned generals who had served in

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1 Ibid., pp.38-39; Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, p.119 ff; Khalidi, p.73.
2 Al-Hussieni, p.41; Ahmad Shaqiri, vol.3, p.752; Mahmoud al-Sabbagh, *Haqiqat al-Tanzim al-Khas* (*The Truth About the Special Organization*), p.88.
3 Al-Hussieni, pp.42-43; Abu Gharbieh, p.18.
4 Khalidi, p.71 ff.

World War I. By late 1938 and early 1939, Britain had effectively reoccupied Palestine, imposing direct military rule and bolstering its forces to 100,000 soldiers—equivalent to one soldier for every four Palestinians. This overwhelming presence underscored the magnitude of Britain's campaign, especially when contrasted with the hardline Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky's claim that establishing Israel would require no fewer than 50,000 soldiers.[1]

The three years of the revolution (1936-1939) led to the martyrdom of around five thousand Palestinians, with approximately fourteen thousand others wounded,[2] in addition to those arrested, exiled, or forced to flee. Some estimates suggest that these losses represented 10% of the adult male population capable of fighting. In practical terms, this meant the elimination of the generation that could have confronted Zionist militias a decade later. Therefore, the reality is that the Nakba was effectively set in motion with the suppression of the Palestinian revolution at the end of the 1930s.[3]

The Palestinians demonstrated remarkable bravery, despite their resistance being scattered and fragmented.[4] Their first organized popular movement took shape in a large 1933 demonstration, which then evolved into the Jerusalem and Jaffa uprisings. This long delay underscores the difficulties of a society struggling with fragmentation and deprived of effective leadership; it took fifteen years before they could mount a peaceful popular movement comparable to Gandhi's resistance in India.[5]

In addition to its fragmentation, the Palestinian resistance was hampered by a vast imbalance in power and weaponry, compounded by global complicity—especially from the British—and by Arab betrayal, with many regional capitals governed by leaders aligned with the occupiers. It is crucial to remember that the British Empire was the world's dominant power at that time.

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1 Ibid., p.81.
2 See al-Hussieni, p.40; Muhsin Saleh, p.54.
3 Khalidi, pp.21, 70-71.
4 Salah Khalaf, p.63.
5 Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, p.37 ff.

Even populous, resource-rich countries like India, Egypt, and Iraq faced prolonged struggles to free themselves from British rule. How, then, could a small, resource-poor people like the Palestinians succeed in such an unequal struggle? Yet, the Palestinians performed extraordinary feats of valor, achieving results that defied the enormous disparity in resources. Their very decision to take up this fight and sustain their resistance is a testament to their unique courage.

Palestinian resistance was not in vain, as Britain's response to this relentless uprising led it to seek a measure of appeasement. With the onset of World War II on the horizon, Britain urgently needed stability in the region. Consequently, it revoked the Palestine partition plan, released exiled leaders of the Higher Arab Committee, and convened a conference in London for negotiations between Arabs and Jews. In May 1939, Britain issued the *White Paper*, representing its most substantial concession to the Palestinians. This document, however, ignited tensions with the Jewish community, as it limited Jewish immigration to 75,000 and restricted land sales, banning them in some areas. Yet, Britain firmly withheld amnesty for Palestinian rebels and barred the return of Amin al-Husseini, the political leader of Palestine.[1] Britain sought a controlled peace, carefully avoiding any actions that might rekindle revolutionary fervor.

Amin al-Husseini was unable to return to Palestine, but he undertook a challenging and eventful journey, moving through Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey before eventually settling in Germany. There, he sought an alliance with the Germans, Britain's enemies, in hopes of securing a commitment countering the Balfour Declaration. His aim was an agreement in which the Arabs would align with Germany in exchange for support to liberate their lands and dismantle the Zionist project. This agreement was indeed formalized and extended to German training of Arab forces and supplying them with some weaponry.[2]

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[1] Al-Hussieni, p.43 ff.

[2] Ibid., p.73 ff, and p.109 ff.

However, the situation was reversed with the defeat of Germany and Italy in World War II, positioning the British among the victors. Moreover, the United States emerged as a new superpower, concluding the war and standing as the most dominant force—untouched and unexhausted by the global conflict in the manner the British, French, and Russians had been worn out.

At this juncture, Britain officially abandoned the White Paper, as announced by Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin on November 14, 1945. This was followed by two large waves of Jewish immigration: over 90,000 Jews during World War II and another 60,000 afterward. The situation for Haj Amin al-Husseini became increasingly dire; he fled to France, where he was captured but eventually managed to escape. Making his way to Egypt, he sought to lead the next crucial phase of Palestinian resistance in the tense period leading up to the Nakba and the declaration of the State of Israel.

The Nakba of 1948 and the Declaration of the State of Israel

In 1948, the Palestinians entered the war controlling 94% of the territory and comprising 69% of Palestine's population. By the end of the conflict, Israel had captured 78% of the territory, displacing 800,000 Palestinians in the process.

Conditions in the Arab World Before 1948

Following World War I, the Arab countries found themselves in a state of hardship, under puppet governments established by the foreign occupiers. While granted nominal independence, the substance of sovereignty remained elusive as the British and French retained real power. To understand the situation in Palestine, it is crucial to examine the conditions of the surrounding Arab nations.

Egypt

By the close of World War I, Egypt had been under British occupation for nearly forty years. The British had taken control of Egypt to ensure the stability of the Muhammad Ali dynasty, which had introduced modernization to Egypt but also turned the country into a resource for foreign exploitation. In the midst of World War I, the British made various promises to appease the Egyptian people and gain time, one of which was a pledge to eventually withdraw from Egypt.

When the British delayed their withdrawal and the political leaders failed to act effectively, a massive Egyptian revolution erupted in 1919, nearly shaking the foundations of British rule in Egypt. In response, the British sought to diffuse the revolution by creating a leadership loyal to them, in which they succeeded. Saad Zaghloul, a figure closely aligned with British interests, emerged as

the leader of the revolution. However, instead of sustaining the popular uprising, he diverted it into negotiations, resulting in a symbolic form of independence. A new constitution was enacted, granting substantial powers to the king, and a parliament was established with limited authority. Beginning in 1923, Egypt entered what became known as the "liberal era," but real power remained firmly in British hands. Their westernized supporters controlled the press and media, leading political parties, and engaging in a peaceful struggle for independence—an independence they would not achieve for another three decades.

During this period, the concept of the nation-state solidified, particularly in the form of secular Egyptian nationalism. Egyptian politicians largely disregarded the Palestinian cause.[1] In fact, Egypt was home to a significant Jewish community, alongside a pro-Zionist Jewish press, including publications like *Israel*, *al-Shams* (*The Sun*), and *al-Ittihād al-Isrā'ilī* (*The Israeli Union*), which openly supported Zionism. Even non-Zionist media often reflected Zionist viewpoints. Many Egyptian politicians, seeking to navigate these dynamics, publicly expressed sympathy for Jewish rights and condemned Palestinian resistance, framing it as religious intolerance and ideological extremism. As a result, the Palestinian issue became highly divisive among Egypt's political elite, with opinions ranging from passive indifference to outright neglect, often leaving the cause sidelined in political discourse.[2]

The Egyptian authorities and elite frequently offered open support to Zionist interests while actively detaining Palestinians and their sympathizers on numerous occasions. For instance, Palestinians protesting the Balfour Declaration during his visit to Egypt were arrested. During the 1929 Al-Buraq Uprising, the Egyptian government, under Prime Minister Muhammad Mahmoud, adopted a hostile stance. The state newspaper *Al-Siyasah* even threatened Palestinian deportations, citing accusations

[1] Tarik al-Bishri, *al-Harakah al-Siyasiyah fi Misr* (The Political Life in Egypt), p.316.
[2] Ibid., p.317 ff. Also, see Awatif Abd al-Rahman, *Misr wa Filistin* (*Egypt and Palestine*), p.154 ff,

of inciting sectarian strife and public unrest;[1] indeed, several Palestinians, including Abdel Qader al-Husseini, were ultimately expelled.[2] In 1930, under Prime Minister Ismail Sidqi, the government shut down the Palestinian newspaper *Al-Shura*.[3] At the same time, the palace-affiliated newspaper, *Al-Saray*, openly supported the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, claiming that Jewish migration would bring valuable expertise and capital—a full endorsement of Zionist arguments. The newspaper further alleged that even "extremists" were beginning to accept this solution, suggesting that Palestinians were growing more receptive to the Jewish presence through cohabitation.[4]

Under Prime Minister Ahmed Zeywar, the Egyptian government sent Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayed, President of the Egyptian University, as its official representative to the opening of the Hebrew University.[5] Taha Hussein also sent a congratulatory telegram and later visited Jerusalem at the invitation of the Hebrew University and the British governor.[6] Hussein even found ways around regulations to facilitate an Egyptian student's enrollment at the Hebrew University.[7] At that time, Taha Hussein was a prominent advocate for an Egyptian identity rooted in its Pharaonic heritage.[8]

Under Prime Minister Ismail Sidqi, the Egyptian government took part in the Tel Aviv Zionist Expo in the spring of 1932.[9] Khedive Abbas Hilmi II went even further, leveraging his influence with certain leaders to urge Palestinians toward reconciliation with the Jews, even proposing that they leave their land and relocate east of the Jordan River.[10] During the major

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1 Tarik al-Bishri, p.316.
2 *Al-Mawsūah al-Filistīnīyah*, vol.3/168.
3 Tarik al-Bishri, p.316.
4 Awatif Abd al-Rahman, p.92.
5 Ibid.
6 Suzan Taha Hussien, *Maāk* (*With You!*), p.80.
7 Ibid., p.153.
8 Shuqeiri, vol.3, p.755 ff.
9 Awatif Abd al-Rahman, p.92.
10 Shakib Arslan, *Ūrwat al-Ittihād bain Ahl al-Jihād*, pp.97-98.

Palestinian strike of 1936, the Egyptian government, led by Prime Minister Mustafa al-Nahhas, allowed hundreds of Egyptian workers to travel to Palestine to offset the labor shortage caused by the strike.[1] When Egyptian Prime Minister Muhammad Mahmoud Pasha was asked about the Palestine issue during a visit to Europe, he replied, "I am the Prime Minister of Egypt, not the Prime Minister of Palestine."[2]

In Egypt, several books praised the Jewish people and promoted the idea of their return to Palestine.[3] Some publications went as far as urging the Egyptian king and government to support the establishment of a Jewish state and assist in the "rescue of this oppressed Jewish people."[4] Meanwhile, publishing works that addressed the massacres and destruction in Palestine was a risky endeavor; authors had to publish anonymously, distribute secretly, and risk punitive action.[5] Since 1920, *Israel*, a newspaper affiliated with the Zionist movement, had been published in Egypt.

The aim here is not to evaluate the Egyptian government's stance on the Palestinian cause or to examine its inconsistent approach but rather to highlight that this was never a strictly principled position. The approach was varied and influenced by shifting interests, with the same actors often adjusting their positions based on personal agendas, strategic calculations, or intra-elite rivalries. Police forces, military power, and economic resources were under effective British control. Although the Egyptian people were sympathetic, supportive, and willing to sacrifice for Palestine, their actions were limited to what British authorities would permit. As a result, Egypt became one of the main hubs of Zionist propaganda in the Arab world.[6]

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[1] Awatif, p.96.
[2] *Majallat al-Nadhīr*, issue 9, July 25, 1938, pp.6-7.
[3] See, for example, Shahin Makarios, *Tārīk al-Isrāʾīlīyīn*, published in 1904.
[4] See, for example, Ili Levi Abu Asal, *Yaqazat al-ʿĀlam al-Yahūdī* (*The Revival of Jewish World*). Published in 1934.
[5] *Majallat al-Nadhīr*, issue 9, July 25, 1938, p.1; Mahmud Abd al-Halim, *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn: Ahdāth Sanaʿat al-Tārīkh*, vol.1, pp.175-76.
[6] Awatif Abd Rahman, pp.8, 18-19.

Jordan

Following World War I, Sharif Hussein's ambitions for an Arab caliphate stretching across Iraq and the Levant came to nothing, as British promises went unfulfilled. His life ended in exile in Cyprus, stripped of his kingdom and title, despite once being the Sharif of Hijaz and dedicating his forces to British interests.

His eldest son, Abdullah, was given a barren piece of desert east of the Jordan River by the British, forming a political entity somewhat awkwardly named the "Emirate of Transjordan." This region, later transformed into the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1947, lacked resources, infrastructure, and even a city of significant size. At its inception, the emirate was far from being a functional state, much less a kingdom.

Abdullah inherited from his father a deep-seated loyalty to the British, becoming one of their most trusted and compliant allies. His relationship with them was often described as "exceptionally close and unparalleled."[1] The British funded him to establish a personal army, sustain his rule, and consolidate his authority over the Arab tribes in the region. This army, led by British officers, aimed to recruit tribal members as soldiers to form what would resemble a national force, with the prominent British commander Glubb Pasha at the helm.

Abdullah was far from content with the meager, barren territory he had been granted that was devoid of substantial resources. While the British had awarded Iraq to his younger brother Faisal, the Hijaz slipped from the family's hands when Ibn Saud, with British acquiescence, seized it, as they had withdrawn their support for Sharif Hussein and his sons. To the north, Syria was under French control. Hemmed in on all sides, Abdullah turned his ambitions toward Palestine, envisioning it as a steppingstone for further expansion into Syria or Iraq. He saw

[1] Mary Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan*, pp.13 [Arabic Edition].

Palestine as a region without a formal government,[1] making it a plausible addition to his emirate.

His aspirations gained momentum in 1946, when he obtained nominal independence, though his army's funding still relied on Britain, as the emirate's resources were inadequate to sustain it. Lacking true strength and bound tightly to British interests, Abdullah resolved to be their most loyal ally, hoping they might eventually support his ambitions in Palestine. Some reports reveal that, when he learned of Britain's intentions to withdraw from Palestine, he grew apprehensive about losing their support, to the extent of considering abdication[2]—an attitude characteristic of someone entirely dependent on a foreign power.

During his thirty-year rule (1921–1951), Abdullah's close alignment with British interests, and even Zionist objectives, was striking. He often acted as though he were a loyal colonial administrator appointed by the British. His collaboration extended to meetings and arrangements with prominent Zionist leaders such as Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, and Moshe Dayan, playing a crucial role in facilitating the Zionist takeover of Palestine. Notably, he was the only Arab leader to endorse the UN Partition Plan for Palestine, as the British assured him that the Arab-designated areas would come under his control.[3]

Syria

Initially, the British placed Faisal bin Hussein as ruler of Damascus. However, their withdrawal from promises made to the French in the Sykes-Picot Agreement led to a French invasion of Syria, resulting in Faisal's ousting. The British then appointed him as King of Iraq. Syria remained under French occupation from 1920 until its independence in 1946, though it obtained a level of

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[1] As noted, the British took deliberate steps to ensure that Palestine would remain without a governing authority.

[2] Ibid., pp.16-17.

[3] The esteemed Palestinian historian Dr. Anis Sayigh authored a comprehensive book analyzing the Hashemites' positions and policies regarding the Palestinian issue, titled *The Hashemites and the Palestinian Cause*.

self-governance under French supervision starting in 1936, similar to Egypt's arrangement after 1922. With the advent of World War II, American influence began to eclipse the older European colonial powers, pressuring France to end its colonial hold as the United States advanced a new model of influence in the region.

A rivalry arose between the regimes in Syria and Jordan. The King of Jordan aspired to annex Syria, driven by his father's unfulfilled dream—or rather, his own relentless pursuit of that dream—of a grand Arab state encompassing the Levant, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula. Meanwhile, the newly independent Syrian regime, though its independence was largely nominal and limited, rejected monarchy and aimed to establish a civil, democratic republic. From Syria's perspective, Jordan was a territory unjustly severed from its domain, and many Syrians believed it should be reunited with Syria. Moreover, Abdullah's notorious reputation for betrayal rendered him unacceptable, even to those Syrians who might have otherwise entertained the notion of a monarchy.[1]

As the situation in Palestine deteriorated and events moved toward the deployment of armies, Abdullah grew increasingly anxious that Saudi and Syrian forces might exploit the opportunity to invade and occupy Jordan. In response, he turned to Iraq, which was ruled by his Hashemite relatives, to seek military assistance to counter what he perceived as a looming conspiracy. At the time, the Arab states were divided into two camps: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria on one side, and Iraq and Jordan on the other.[2] Overseeing them all, however, was Britain, which maintained control—except in Syria, whose regime displayed a comparatively greater degree of independence. Even so, Abdullah feared that any deviation from British policy might prompt a British occupation of his kingdom.

This was the state of the so-called "frontline states," whose actions significantly contributed to the consolidation of the Zionist presence, the weakening of Palestinian resistance, and the denial of

[1] See *The Memoire of Adel Arslan*, vol.2, p,849.
[2] *Memoir of Fawzi al-Qawiqji*, p.333.

Palestinian statehood. It can even be argued that the Zionist state could neither have been established nor stabilized without the complicity of these Arab regimes. As we will examine further, the actions of these states during the 1948 war played a crucial role in facilitating the Zionist state's entrenchment.

Behind the "frontline states," the situation in the rest of the Arab world was equally dire. In Iraq, the other branch of the Hashemite family, Faisal bin Hussein, who had been expelled by the French from Syria, ruled under the shadow of British dominance. Following the suppression of the 1920 revolt, the British installed Faisal as king after Iraq was granted nominal independence in the aftermath of its 1920 revolution. This arrangement echoed Britain's actions in Egypt following the 1919 revolution. Hashemite rule in Iraq faced multiple attempts at liberation, all quashed with British intervention, such as Rashid Ali al-Kilani's coup in 1941. Ultimately, a military coup in 1958 toppled the monarchy and established a military republic in Iraq. Even if these rulers had desired to support Palestine—a notion that is itself questionable—their options were constrained. Notably, King Faisal himself had participated in an agreement with Chaim Weizmann, endorsing the establishment of a Jewish state as part of the "greater Arab state" Britain had promised to Sharif Hussein—a promise later betrayed.

In Saudi Arabia, Abdulaziz Al Saud governed with ties to the British that rivaled or even surpassed those of the Hashemites. It was the British who drew the borders of his kingdom and later aided him in suppressing the Ikhwan movement when it threatened to rebel against his authority. Even if Abdulaziz had harbored the desire to aid Palestine, his capacity was limited. He ruled over a vast, sparsely populated territory devoid of significant resources—this was before the discovery and exploitation of oil, which was managed by British and American companies.

Further afield, the rest of the Arab world, including the small Gulf monarchies and the North African states, was likewise under colonial control. While their populations were moved by deep

sympathy and solidarity with Palestine, their limited resources left them unable to secure their own independence, let alone confront the conspiracy targeting Palestine.

In all these countries, the governments were, at best, weak and ineffectual, and subservient to their colonial rulers. They differed only in the degree of their dependence and loyalty to these powers.

The Partition of Palestine

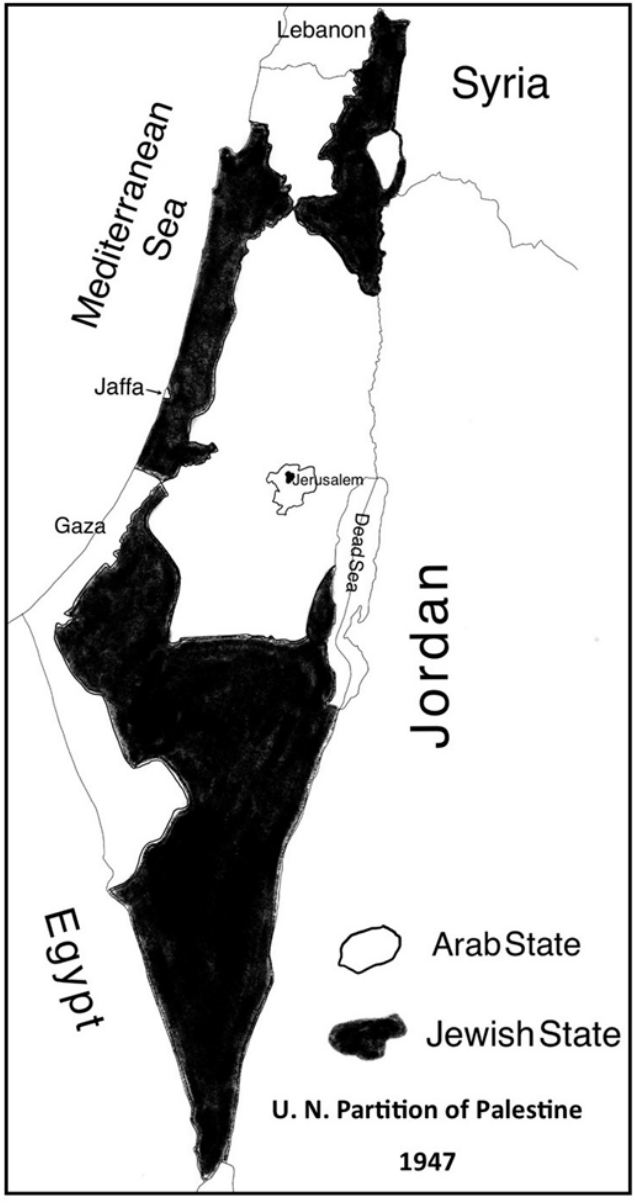
Britain emerged from World War II battered and depleted. As its influence waned, the Zionist movement shifted its efforts toward aligning with the new global superpower in the United States. At the same time, Zionist militias in Palestine launched a campaign against the British, framing themselves as a liberation movement striving to expel the colonial occupiers. This narrative harmonized with the global discourse on self-determination, championed by the rising powers of the U.S. and the Soviet Union, as they positioned themselves to take over the colonial holdings of the declining British and French empires.

The American model of imperialism was innovative, favoring indirect control through influence and client governments rather than direct military occupation. The Zionist movement skillfully adapted to this approach, serving as an instrument of American influence to drive the British out of Palestine. Disguised as a liberation struggle, it capitalized on global sympathy by opposing British colonial rule.[1] At the Zionist Congress in Atlanta in 1944, the movement formally demanded the withdrawal of British forces from Palestine and called for international protection for the Jewish community.

The Zionists intensified their efforts through a calculated guerrilla campaign against British forces, engaging in bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings with significant impact. Between 1946 and 1947, British casualties reached 169. By the end of the

[1] El-Messiri, *Rihlati al-Fikriyah*, p.493; Khalidi, p.29.

British Mandate, Zionist militias had carried out over 500 operations against British targets.



It was particularly ironic that Winston Churchill, who had played a key role in training early Jewish militias, publicly expressed his frustration and issued warnings at the United Nations. Yet, these warnings were widely regarded as empty rhetoric that was devoid of meaningful action or consequences.

Despite all this, Britain largely remained silent, refraining from taking any significant action against the Zionists. By this time, the Zionist movement had secured the protection of the United States. Moreover, many members of the British police and military forces stationed in Palestine were themselves Jews or were aligned with Zionist interests. Simultaneously, Britain continued to suppress Palestinian resistance, arresting individuals merely for possessing weapons—leading to 300 detentions in the first half of 1946 alone.

On the global stage, the Zionist movement played a pivotal role in financing the campaign of U.S. President Harry Truman, a Christian Zionist sympathizer.[1] After his victory, Truman rewarded their support by approving the immigration of 100,000 Jews to Palestine. In the United States, Zionist organizations also mobilized Jewish communities to raise funds for the establishment of military industries in Israel. This enabled Haganah militias to begin producing their own weapons, further bolstering their position—even against the British.

By this point, the situation in Palestine had crystallized into three distinct realities:

1. British Occupation: After nearly three decades of control, Britain was under increasing pressure from the United States to withdraw. Meanwhile, it faced resistance from both Palestinian and Zionist forces, with its position increasingly untenable.

2. Zionist Expansion: The Jewish population had grown significantly, with military organizations, educational systems, industrial capabilities, media networks, and commercial enterprises firmly in place. They demanded independence from British rule and enjoyed strong international backing, especially from the

[1] On Truman's Zionism, see Regina Sharif, p.137 ff.

emerging global power, the United States. Additionally, they had indirect support from neighboring Arab regimes.

3. Palestinian Resistance: The indigenous Palestinian population, worn down by decades of suppression and resource depletion, sought liberation from both British and Zionist occupations. However, they lacked the means of resistance and the support of influential allies, leaving them at a significant disadvantage in their struggle.

After World War II, the victorious powers established an international organization (The United Nations) through which they could oversee global affairs, effectively serving as a world government. This organization granted special privileges to the five victorious nations—the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, France, and China—by making them permanent members of its Security Council, each with the power of veto. This veto power allowed any one of these nations to block the implementation of resolutions, regardless of majority consensus. The United Nations thus became a tool for the victors to maintain global dominance, cloaking their interests in the guise of international law and universal resolutions.

The Palestine issue was presented in the United Nations as a conflict between Arabs and Jews, with both sides asserting historical claims to the land. Britain announced its intention to withdraw from Palestine by May 1948, relinquishing its mandate to the United Nations. The stage was set for international powers, through the UN, to push forward a resolution that divided the land between the two groups. This resolution, known as Resolution 181, was adopted in 1947. It allocated 54.7% of Palestine's territory to the Jews, 44.8% to the Palestinians, and designated Jerusalem and Bethlehem as an international zone.[1]

This resolution was peculiar and anomalous, as it empowered nations to decide the fate of a land, they neither owned nor understood. Many of the countries that supported the resolution,

[1] See the text of the resolution 181 in *Palestine's Documents File*, vol.1, p.895 ff.

such as Haiti, the Philippines, Guatemala, and Liberia, had no connection to Palestine whatsoever.[1] Furthermore, the resolution determined the future of a country and its people without consulting them or granting them the right to self-determination. Adding to this, General Assembly resolutions are non-binding, even according to the UN Charter itself.

The allocation of land was also entirely illogical and unreasonable. Despite years of Jewish immigration, land purchases, and seizures, Palestinians still owned 90% of the land in Palestine, including 80% of its arable land. How, then, could a resolution allocate only 44% of the territory to the Palestinians?

If we examine the major powers behind the crafting and passage of this resolution, it becomes clear that Britain had been its original sponsor and patron from the outset. The United States had now taken up the mantle, becoming its surrogate champion. As for the Soviet Union, its leaders naively believed that the illegitimate state might adopt communist ideology and serve as their gateway to influence the region and access to the Mediterranean.

When the Partition Plan was announced, the official Arab stance was one of rejection—except for King Abdullah of Jordan. Motivated by ambitions to expand his kingdom westward, he supported the plan with the aim of annexing the portion of Palestine allocated to the Arabs. This position aligned closely with British interests and led to his active involvement in facilitating and implementing the plan.

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[1] Some countries initially opposed or abstained from voting on the resolution, putting its passage in jeopardy. However, their stances shifted under the weight of pressure and bribery orchestrated by major powers and influential Jewish businessmen. Lavish gifts, such as diamonds and luxurious fur coats for the spouses of some leaders, proved sufficient to alter political positions. Likewise, promises of economic incentives or threats of economic repercussions achieved similar outcomes.
In effect, Palestine and the lands of Muslims were reduced to a feast offered to all. Those who desired a share tore into it, while others sold their portion of the prey for personal gain. (See: Mohsen Saleh, *The Palestinian Cause*, pp. 59–60; Roger Garaudy, *The Founding Myths*, p. 228).

From another perspective, King Abdullah's control over the remaining parts of Palestine was the most advantageous scenario for both the British and the Zionists. As one of their most loyal and cooperative allies, he ensured a smooth collaboration with their agendas. For Palestinians, however, this annexation was deeply opposed, as they saw it as merely shifting from direct British occupation to indirect control under British influence.[1]

The official Arab rejection of the partition plan amounted to little more than empty rhetoric. Their declarations did not align with their actual intentions, and even if some leaders were sincere, their stance lacked the practical means to be translated into action. This weakness stemmed from the fact that these governments were largely subservient to British control and possessed only nominal independence. Furthermore, the Arab League—the body tasked with coordinating Arab efforts—was inherently weak, having been established to serve British interests and remaining firmly under British influence.

Arab military forces were equally unprepared, lacking the numbers, equipment, and organization needed to confront British forces already in control of Palestine. They also suffered from inadequate intelligence about both the land and their Zionist adversaries, and they operated without a unified, or even partially unified, command structure.

Although some individuals within the Arab League were motivated by genuine Islamic, Arab, and nationalist sentiments, the League's overall actions ultimately facilitated, supported, and even empowered the establishment of the Zionist state. The League adhered to British policy, which barred the entry of Arab forces into Palestine until May 15, 1948—the official date of the British withdrawal.

Meanwhile, the transfer of control over Palestine from the British to the Zionists was already well underway. The Zionists acquired arms from the British through purchases and obtained

[1] Khalidi, pp.87-88.

additional resources via direct support. By early 1948, they had procured 24 aircraft for five million pounds. Administratively and militarily, the Jewish Agency had established effective control, commanding a fighting force that included the Haganah militias (35,000 members), 10,000 specialized fighters, and extremist organizations such as the Irgun and Stern gangs.

On the other hand, Palestinian society was at a significant disadvantage. Exhausted by the Great Revolt of 1936–1939, it was prohibited from bearing arms or receiving military training. Palestinians also lacked political or military backing from neighboring countries. Their sole defense lay in their indomitable courage. Those who joined resistance organizations faced severe limitations, as they had no weapons, and their training was confined to physical drills and theoretical lessons.[1]

Another potential advantage the Palestinians had, beyond their bravery, was the possibility of manpower from Arab and Muslim volunteers willing to join their struggle. However, as we will see, both Arab regimes and international powers worked to deprive them of even this lifeline.

The Partition Plan, which purported to aim for peace, instead became a catalyst for war. The Zionists fought to claim the land allotted to them and to expel its Arab inhabitants, while the Arabs fought to resist this encroachment. The British, for their part, delivered one final service to the Zionist cause. While they announced their withdrawal by May 1948 and pledged to punish any attack on their forces until then, they simultaneously orchestrated the gradual handover of key cities to Zionist forces in a coordinated manner.

Thus, Palestinians, and the Arab forces supporting them, often woke to the news of premature British withdrawals, only to find Zionist forces swiftly occupying cities and seizing government buildings. This left the Zionists in an increasingly advantageous

[1] Salah Khalaf, pp.29-30.

position to launch their campaign of territorial conquest and population displacement.

The British Withdrawal and the Handover to the Zionists

On March 10, 1948, two months before the end of the British Mandate, the Haganah leadership finalized a meticulous plan to depopulate Palestinian villages. This plan prioritized terror over military superiority, with the aim of instilling fear so profound that residents would flee without attempting resistance. Massacres or large-scale assaults were seen as essential to achieving this objective. Captured individuals were often executed on the spot before being sent to central detention camps, ensuring a climate of fear that would paralyze any attempts at organized resistance.

Villages were typically surrounded on three sides and subjected to intense bombardment, leaving one side open as an escape route. This forced residents to flee in panic. The displacement campaign began along the Mediterranean coast and moved eastward, ensuring the fledgling Zionist state maintained access to the sea. The first targets of this operation were villages and towns in northern and western Palestine, with an estimated 350,000 Palestinians forcibly displaced in its initial phase.

Zionist militias employed a range of brutal methods to achieve their objectives. These included direct military assaults on villages, market bombings, car explosions, roadside ambushes, and the indiscriminate killing of Palestinians. Specialized units, such as the *mistaʿaravim* (operatives disguised as Arabs), carried out covert operations. In some cases, water supplies were deliberately contaminated with bacteria, and in others, entire villages were set ablaze with residents trapped inside.[1]

The sheer scope of these bitter, painful, and horrifying events defies full documentation in this brief account. Nevertheless, it is vital for every Muslim to equip themselves with this knowledge, as

[1] For more details, see Ilan Peppe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*.

it not only informs the mind but also shapes the conscience, stirs the emotions, and forges a deeper sense of humanity—often surpassing the importance of intellectual understanding.

If such works aim to cultivate awareness and intellect, they must also underscore the vital importance of understanding the details that vividly expose and irrefutably demonstrate the nature of the enemy—their brutality, cruelty, and unyielding arrogance. Menachem Begin himself unabashedly boasted that the Deir Yassin massacre played a pivotal role in spreading terror across neighboring regions, facilitating the fall of Haifa as effortlessly as "a knife slicing through butter."[1]

Haifa fell in April 1948, a month before the scheduled British withdrawal, as a result of coordinated efforts between the British and the Zionists. This city held exceptional importance due to its status as a vibrant commercial hub with a renowned port and oil refinery. At the time, Haifa's Arab population exceeded 70,000. Zionist assaults on the city began as early as December 1947 and escalated in April 1948, supported by artillery and airstrikes. By the end of the onslaught, Haifa's Arab population had been reduced, through killings and forced displacement, to a mere 3,000 to 4,000.

A few days later, Jaffa succumbed to a similar fate. The offensive on its outskirts began on April 27, 1948. As each area fell, Zionist militias strategically positioned artillery to bombard the remaining parts of the city, leaving the residents with no choice but to flee. Jaffa, which had also been home to around 70,000 Arabs, saw its population dwindle to just 4,000 or 5,000 by the time the Zionists completed their operations.

Other cities, such as Safed, Beisan, and various areas in Galilee, fell in similarly orchestrated campaigns. A recurring pattern in these events was the premature withdrawal of British forces from key locations, meticulously coordinated with Zionist militias. Meanwhile, Britain steadfastly barred Arab forces from entering Palestine until May 14, 1948, the official date of their withdrawal.

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[1] Menachem Begin, *The Revolt*, p.165.

The Arab Liberation Army, composed of volunteer forces, was left in a compromised state, as will be discussed later.

Thus, the conspiracy against the defenseless and war-weary Palestinian people reached its culmination. Exhausted and stripped of resources, they were left without any viable means to defend themselves against the tens of thousands of highly trained and heavily armed Zionist militias.

In every account of a city's fall or a village massacre, waves of refugees poured forth, whether fleeing from cities that had been seized, villages that had been destroyed with their inhabitants slaughtered, or from those who saw these horrors as a harbinger of their own fate. Stripped of the means to resist and with no one to support them, they fled to avoid the same grim destiny. These desperate waves of humanity wandered aimlessly, some managing to reach the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, or Syria, depending on what was within their grasp. Others roamed without direction, and many perished along the way—from exhaustion, illness, hunger, cold, or the sting of scorpions and snakes. The fortunate few found refuge in caves, under rocks, or within the shelter of boulders, but for most, no sanctuary was to be found.

On May 14, 1948, the British formally departed Palestine. David Ben-Gurion stepped forward to proclaim the independence of the State of Israel, standing beneath a towering portrait of Theodor Herzl, the ideological visionary who had sown the seeds of Zionism. Herzl had passed away just eight years after laying out his vision, yet four decades later, his dream was brought to fruition.

Thus, the ancient Quranic prophecy was realized, bringing the Jews back to the Holy Land,

﴿وَقُلۡنَا مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِۦ لِبَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱسۡكُنُواْ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ فَإِذَا جَآءَ وَعۡدُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ جِئۡنَا بِكُمۡ لَفِيفٗا١٠٤﴾

﴿And We said after Pharaoh to the Children of Israel, "Dwell in the land, and when there comes the promise of the Hereafter, We will bring you forth in [one] gathering."﴾ (Surat al-Isrā, 104).

This event marked the beginning of a new and harrowing chapter in the history of Palestine, the Arabs, the Muslims, and indeed, the entire world.

The 1948 Nakba

Despite the unparalleled support Zionists received from the powerful British Empire over three decades, their conquest of Palestine was far from effortless. It was met with fierce resistance by the Palestinians. Though they were besieged by dire circumstances, meager resources, and widespread international and Arab betrayal, they stood their ground and fought with remarkable courage and determination.

To simplify the history of this turbulent and intricate period, we can classify the resistance into three key levels:

1. Palestinian Resistance, led primarily by the Holy Jihad Movement under the leadership of Abd al-Qadir al-Hussieni.

2. The Arab Liberation Army, formed by the Arab League to organize volunteers for the fight in Palestine.

3. Official Arab Armies, which entered Palestine after the end of the British Mandate and engaged in the 1948 war.

It is crucial to recognize that these three levels of resistance, whether acting independently or collectively, were vastly under-resourced compared to the Zionist militias. They lacked sufficient weapons, ammunition, military training, and logistical expertise. Financial resources and supply routes were also severely limited. Furthermore, they were devoid of the robust political backing that the Zionist forces enjoyed. Even the official Arab armies suffered from inadequate numbers and equipment, lacked prior combat experience, and operated under regimes still effectively controlled by foreign colonial powers.

The people of Palestine were effectively stripped of their right to defend themselves and their homeland, despite their preference to bear this responsibility on their own. As the ones most familiar with their land and enemy, they were best positioned to resist the

Zionist onslaught. All they required from the Arab states was the necessary financial and military support.[1] Moreover, entrusting the resistance to the Palestinians alone would have offered significant political advantages. It would have undermined Zionist propaganda, which portrayed Israel as a small, struggling state seeking independence and unfairly besieged by larger, more populous, and better-equipped Arab nations. This depiction was entirely misleading, as the Zionist militias, as we shall see, outnumbered and outmatched the combined Arab armies in both size and armament.

Despite this, the Arab League and the official Arab regimes insisted on intervening directly, exacerbating the situation and paving the way for catastrophic outcomes. A closer examination of history reveals that Arab policies and military actions during this period were instrumental in enabling and solidifying Israel's establishment and presence.[2]

Furthermore, the Palestinian community suffered from the absence of political leadership on the ground. Many believe that a critical error of this period was the absence of Hajj Amin al-Hussieni, the only political figure widely recognized for his leadership. While King Farouk of Egypt barred him from returning to Palestine, it was imperative for al-Hussieni to find a way to overcome this restriction and assume his rightful role during such a pivotal time.[3]

The Holy Jihad Movement

Abd al-Qadir al-Hussieni's effort to transform popular sentiment into an organized armed resistance stands as one of the most successful endeavors in the history of Palestinian resistance

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[1] Arif al-Arif, *Nakbat Filistīn*, vol.1, pp.14-15; Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, vol.1, pp.146-47; Mahmud al-Sabbagh, pp.91, 169.

[2] *Memoire of Amin al-Hussieni*, p.103; Abdullah Azzam, *al-Dhakhā'ir al-Iẓām*, vol.1, p.835.

[3] Ibrahim Ghusha, *al-Midhanah al-Hamrā': Sīrah Dhātīyah* (*The Red Minaret: An Autobiography*), p.23; Awni Farsakh, *al-Tahaddī wa al-Ijābah* (*The Challenge and Response*), pp.873-74.

since the Great Palestinian Revolt. A distinguished figure during that revolt, Abd al-Qadir had been wounded and arrested but later escaped, spending time in various Arab and European countries.

In the summer of 1946, Abd al-Qadir al-Hussieni met in Cairo with his cousin, Mufti Amin al-Hussieni, the political leader of the Palestinians. The Mufti had fled Palestine and traveled across several countries, seeking alliances with Axis powers to counter Allied support for a Zionist state. However, the Axis defeat in World War II thwarted his ambitions. Pursued by both Jewish forces and the Allies, he eventually settled in Cairo. It was there that the Arab Higher Committee convened and agreed to establish an armed resistance movement, *The Holy Jihad Movement*, under Abd al-Qadir's leadership.

Abd al-Qadir traveled extensively across Palestinian villages, leveraging his stellar reputation and deep connections to recruit a significant number of young men. These recruits were organized not only for military operations but also for protecting and managing villages in collaboration with local leaders. The Holy Jihad Movement was structured into various specialized units, including:

- Boycott enforcement and anti-collaboration unit: This unit warned collaborators with Jewish forces. If warnings were ignored, their warehouses, homes, and goods were destroyed.

- Land protection unit: Dedicated to preventing land sales, it warned brokers and assassinated those who persisted in selling land to Zionist entities.

- Regional military units: These were responsible for conducting armed operations across different areas.

- Support and logistics units: Tasked with auxiliary and operational support roles.

- Intelligence unit: Focused on gathering critical information.

Jerusalem served as the movement's headquarters, chosen for its strategic importance as the center of Zionist settlements and the

heart of the Palestinian struggle. The city was seen as the decisive battleground, the outcome of which would shape the fate of the illegitimate state that Zionists sought to establish. Indeed, many of the most pivotal battles led by the Holy Jihad Movement were fought in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas.

The movement had several advantages that the Arab Liberation Army (formed to gather Arab volunteers) and official Arab armies lacked:

- A competent and dedicated leadership.
- Fighters who were native to the land, familiar with its terrain, inhabitants, and the nature of the enemy.

The Holy Jihad Army engaged in numerous significant battles, displaying extraordinary courage and heroism that far exceeded its limited resources. It secured decisive victories against adversaries who outnumbered and outgunned them. However, the army ultimately could not halt the advance of the Zionist state, heavily supported by international powers. The harsh reality was that the fighters continued their struggle until they exhausted their ammunition, with many of their leaders either martyred or captured.

Arab complicity played a critical role in this failure. From the very beginning, the Arab League actively worked to impede and undermine Abd al-Qadir al-Hussieni's efforts. It sought to control his resistance and bring it under its authority. Despite these obstacles, al-Hussieni managed to assert his independence and establish the movement. However, his efforts remained reliant on financial and material support, compelling him to maintain a tenuous connection with the Arab League.

After protracted negotiations, the Arab League agreed to provide limited support but attached restrictive conditions. These included barring him from collecting funds directly from villages, confining his operations to the Jerusalem area, and other measures clearly intended to curtail his effectiveness. Despite these constraints, al-Hussieni worked tirelessly to navigate and

circumvent these imposed limitations, striving to sustain the resistance against overwhelming odds.

The Arab Liberation Army not only failed to support Abd al-Qadir al-Hussieni but actively opposed him, refusing to cooperate or supply him with the weapons and ammunition he desperately needed. In his final attempt, al-Hussieni traveled to the Arab Liberation Army's headquarters in Damascus to request reinforcements. His plea was not only denied but met with dismissive and disrespectful treatment.

While still in Damascus, al-Hussieni received alarming news: the strategically vital village of Al-Qastal had fallen to Zionist forces. This village was crucial as it lay on the supply route between Jaffa, the port where reinforcements arrived, and Jerusalem, the epicenter of Zionist settlements and operations. Without hesitation, he rushed back to reclaim this critical position. Though he succeeded in liberating Al-Qastal, he was tragically martyred in the battle, dealing a devastating blow to his army.

Two days before his death, Abd al-Qadir al-Hussieni wrote a poignant letter to the Arab League Secretary-General: "I hold you responsible for abandoning my soldiers at the height of their victories, without support or weapons."

Tragically, on April 9, 1948, just one day after his martyrdom, the infamous Deir Yassin massacre unfolded, casting a dark shadow over his funeral procession and further intensifying the suffering of the Palestinian cause.

The Arab Liberation Army

The surge of Arab and Islamic fervor for jihad in Palestine reached such heights that Arab regimes could neither suppress nor quell it. To channel this wave of enthusiasm, these regimes announced the formation of the "Arab Liberation Army," ostensibly allowing volunteers to join its ranks. However, this initiative marked the beginning of a calculated conspiracy against the Arab people, using the army as a mechanism for control.

The first step in this conspiracy was the prohibition of volunteering through any organization except under the direct authority of the army. Independent battalions were also banned, stripping established groups of their cohesion and organizational efficiency. Those who resisted these restrictions faced punitive measures, including being denied access to weapons and ammunition, a tactic that severely undermined their ability to integrate new volunteers, particularly in an environment where arms were already scarce.[1]

Headquartered in Damascus, the Arab Liberation Army was led by three figures with notable military experience. Yet, during the conflict, their performance was nothing short of disastrous, starkly contrasting with their prior reputations. They managed the army as if it were a conventional military force, disregarding the realities of leading a volunteer army. Their actions often appeared to align with British interests in undermining Palestine's struggle. These three leaders were Ismail Safwat, Taha al-Hashimi, and Fawzi al-Qawuqji:

1. Ismail Safwat was an Iraqi military officer who had risen through the ranks but achieved little distinction beyond his involvement in the 1920 Iraqi revolt. His career reflected that of a conventional officer, lacking notable accomplishments or innovation.

2. Taha al-Hashimi, another Iraqi military expert, earned recognition for his extensive and valuable writings on the art and history of war, particularly in military geography and urban warfare. His career was marked by significant roles in various conflicts, including serving as Iraq's Minister of Defense in 1938 and as Prime Minister in 1941. By 1948, at the age of 60, al-Hashimi possessed vast experience and expertise, but these qualities failed to manifest effectively during the campaign.

1. Fawzi al-Qawuqji, by 1948, was nearing 60 years of age and widely recognized as an expert in guerrilla warfare. A seasoned

[1] Mustafa al-Siba'i, *Jihādunā fī Filistīn*, p.9 ff.

veteran, he had a storied history of resistance: fighting the British in Basra, serving with the Ottomans during World War I, and resisting the French invasion and occupation of Greater Syria, most notably in the Battle of Maysalun. He led the revolution in Hama against French forces and was a key figure in the broader Syrian Revolt of the 1920s. His life was one of relentless struggle; wherever a call to arms arose, he answered it. Al-Qawuqji also volunteered in Palestine during the Great Revolt of 1936 and participated in the failed 1941 coup attempt led by Rashid Ali al-Kilani in Iraq. His unwavering commitment to resistance brought him back to the Levant as war loomed in 1948.[1]

In contrast, neither Ismail Safwat nor Taha al-Hashimi had experience in guerrilla warfare. They had never set foot in Palestine and were unfamiliar with its terrain.[2] Moreover, their relationship with al-Qawuqji was marred by mutual mistrust and suspicion, which undermined the army's operations and negatively impacted the outcomes of its battles.[3]

The most significant and damaging division, however, lay between the leadership of the Arab Liberation Army and the Palestinian leader Haj Amin al-Hussieni. The Mufti was a staunch adversary of the Hashemite regimes in both Jordan and Iraq. His hostility toward King Abdullah of Jordan was understandable; it was a rivalry between a British-aligned monarch and a steadfast opponent of British influence. Their competition for control over the same territory further deepened their animosity.

Al-Hussieni's opposition to the Hashemite regime in Iraq was similarly rooted in its alignment with British interests. He had also played a role in supporting the failed coup led by Rashid Ali al-Kilani, aimed at expelling British influence from Iraq. Both Taha al-Hashimi and Ismail Safwat were loyal to the Iraqi regime, exacerbating tensions with al-Hussieni.

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[1] For more about Qawuqji, see *The Palestinian Encyclopedia,* vol.3, p.480.
[2] *Mudhkkirāt Taha al-Hāshimī*, vol.2, p.176.
[3] See *Qawiqji's Memoire,* p.335-37; *Tāha's Memoire*, vol.2, p.188.

The Arab League structured the leadership of the Arab Liberation Army in a way that intentionally sidelined al-Hussieni and his followers. This decision reflected the League's broader strategy of preventing Palestinians from independently organizing their defense, further stifling their ability to confront the challenges they faced. The Mufti strongly advocated relying on the people of Palestine by arming and training them, emphasizing that organized military units were unnecessary. If external intervention became unavoidable, he argued that any volunteers should be placed under his leadership and that of his cousin, the field commander Abd al-Qadir al-Hussieni. He maintained that the Palestinians, deeply familiar with their land, had a more pressing need for weapons, funding, and training than for additional manpower.[1]

The discord between the leadership of the Arab Liberation Army and the Mufti's faction had devastating repercussions, made worse by the critical timing of the conflict, when even minor disagreements could prove catastrophic.

The Arab Liberation Army welcomed volunteers in large numbers, to the extent that Fawzi al-Qawuqji's residence was reportedly bustling with recruits at all hours. Yet, the weapons supplied by the Arab League were grossly inadequate—"a few hundred rifles for tens of thousands who could have been mobilized to fight." The League defended its failure by asserting that it had assumed sole responsibility for liberating Palestine.[2]

Meanwhile, the Arab Liberation Army was hamstrung by the limited resources provided by Arab regimes, including insufficient funds, subpar weapons, and delayed supplies. The army also suffered from poor timing and constrained authority, leaving it without true operational independence. Its leaders frequently criticized the Arab regimes, blaming their policies, procrastination, and the inadequacy of the arms and equipment provided.

These issues were further exacerbated by a lack of clarity about the army's mission. Was it intended to directly support the

[1] Taha Hashimi, vol.2, p.181.
[2] Salah Khalaf, p.65.

Palestinians, launch a full-scale campaign against the Zionists, or simply maintain a state of tension until the Arab armies intervened? This ambiguity undermined the army's effectiveness and hindered its ability to achieve meaningful results.[1]

The Arab Liberation Army committed a series of critical missteps despite the limited resources and authority at its disposal. Eyewitnesses and historians remain divided on whether these were unintentional blunders, acts of betrayal, or a combination of both. Below is a summary of these errors, presented without analysis, as the scope here does not allow for deeper examination:

1. Restricting Volunteer Recruitment: Although there was overwhelming enthusiasm to join the army, only a small fraction of volunteers were accepted. Recruitment was subsequently halted under the justification that the number of recruits already far exceeded the army's needs. A vague promise to reopen recruitment if necessary left countless eager individuals sidelined and unable to contribute to the struggle.

2. Flawed Selection of Recruits: Many of the accepted recruits were drawn from undisciplined or unsuitable groups, including untrained civilians, individuals with criminal records, and idle youth. This poor selection process led to widespread incidents of theft, looting, and assaults on civilians and businesses.[2] Internal conflicts among recruits occasionally escalated into armed altercations.[3] More alarmingly, the lax vetting allowed Jewish spies and Arab collaborators working for the Zionists to infiltrate the ranks, further compromising the army's effectiveness.[4]

3. Ineffective Training Practices: Instead of training volunteers in guerrilla warfare suited to the context of the conflict, the army adopted methods designed for regular soldiers. This approach was

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[1] See Taha Hashimi, vol.2, p.177 ff, p.183 ff.

[2] Mustafa al-Sibaĭ, *Jihādunā fī Filistīn* (*Our Struggle in Palestine*), pp.9-10; Kāmil al-Sharīf, *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn fī Harb Filistīn* (*The Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine War*), p.28; Arif al-Arif, *Nakbat Filistīn*, vol.1, 247.

[3] *Mudhakkirāt Fawzi al-Qawuqji*, pp.346-47.

[4] Arif al-Arif, vol.1, 247-48.

slow and rigid, failing to keep pace with the rapidly unfolding events on the ground. The mismatch between training methods and the realities of the battlefield left the army ill-equipped to respond swiftly and effectively.[1]

4. Deploying fighters into battles without proper planning, organization, or coordination resulted in chaotic offensives and disorganized retreats, which not only failed to achieve victories but often caused significant setbacks. In some instances, fighters were observed idling in cafés near the frontlines, abandoning their posts and neglecting their combat duties.[2]

5. Limiting the Arab Liberation Army's operations to areas designated for Arabs under the partition plan[3] diverted its focus to regions not under immediate threat. For example, Fawzi al-Qawuqji stationed himself in Nablus and did not extend support to cities allocated to the Jewish side, despite their dire need for defense. As a result, cities like Jaffa and Haifa fell without sufficient resistance. Similarly, the army failed to respond to the crisis in Deir Yassin, despite being stationed close to the village.[4]

6. Refusing to collaborate with other volunteer factions and withholding critical supplies, such as ammunition, severely hampered the defense of Jerusalem. Taha al-Hashimi, for instance, denied these factions the resources necessary to sustain their fight. Additionally, the Arab Liberation Army declined to provide financial support for the purchase of surplus British military

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[1] Qawuqjī, p.336.

[2] Sheikh Mustafa al-Siba'i recounted that he once saw Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Bitar (founders of the Syrian Baath Party) sitting at a café. He scolded them, pointing out that they had enlisted as volunteers for combat yet were sitting idly at the café. He then took them to the battlefront. Michel Aflaq walked with him for some distance before stopping, while Salah al-Bitar advanced further but eventually became fearful and stopped as well. See: Adnan Masoudi, *Ila Al-Muwājaha* (To the Confrontation), pp. 57–58.

[3] Taha al-Hashimi's memoirs indicate that the operations of the Arab Liberation Army were limited to Arab areas, suggesting that it was created to implement the partition plan. See: Taha al-Hashimi, vol.2, pp.176-77.

[4] Mustaf al-Siba'i, p.33; Arif al-Arif, vol.1, pp.248-49, 256; Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, vol.1, p.146.

equipment following their withdrawal, further crippling the resistance effort.[1]

7. Refusing to cooperate with other volunteer factions and withholding critical supplies, such as ammunition, during the defense of Jerusalem severely weakened the collective resistance. For example, Taha al-Hashimi[2] denied these factions access to essential resources, including funds needed to purchase weapons from the surplus British military stockpiles after their withdrawal.[3]

8. Surrendering significant cities like Jaffa, Haifa, and even Jerusalem with little resistance. Taha al-Hashimi attempted to justify this by asserting that Jerusalem was not strategically important and could be easily reclaimed later. However, this claim was far removed from reality. The fall of Jerusalem had profound strategic and political ramifications, along with an immense psychological impact on both Arabs and Jews.[4]

9. Following the directives of Arab regimes without regard to battlefield realities further hampered the effectiveness of the Arab Liberation Army. Orders to advance or retreat often came from political capitals rather than military leaders on the ground. This bureaucratic approach, ill-suited to a volunteer army, resulted in frequent and poorly planned withdrawals,[5] enabling the Zionists to capture territories with surprising ease.[6] On occasion, even the Zionists were astonished by how quickly these territories fell. Moreover, some researchers have highlighted the Arab Liberation Army's disastrous practice of disarming villagers in various areas, only to retreat when faced with Zionist attacks, thereby leaving these communities defenseless. Fawzi al-Qawuqji, for instance, is

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1 Qasim al-Rimawi, *Dākhil al-Sūr al-Qadīm* (*Inside the Old Wall*), pp.372-373.
2 Mustafā al-Siba'i, p.27-28.
3 Arif al-Arif, *Nakbat al-Filistīn*, vol.1, 249-50.
4 *Memoir of Amin al-Hussieni*, pp.393-94, Amir al-Husseini refers in multiple passages of his memoirs to Taha al-Hashimi's naivety or lack of awareness in various matters and past situations, dating back to his tenure as a minister in Iraq (see p. 70).
5 Mustafa al-Siba'i, p.33.
6 Arif al-Arif, vol.1, 308-09.

reported to have executed such actions in villages in the Upper Galilee, exacerbating the vulnerability of the local population.[1]

10. Accepting a truce during pivotal moments allowed the Zionists to exploit the pause, shifting the balance of the battle in their favor by securing reinforcements in manpower and weaponry—a misstep exemplified by Fawzi al-Qawuqji during the Battle of "Mishmar HaEmek."[2]

Moreover, during critical moments, the volunteers received no support or reinforcement from the Arab capitals, even after the entry of the Arab armies. Arab officials showed little concern when the forces appealed for help, often instructing them to retreat—even if such withdrawals risked massive massacres of refugees and local residents, including in Jerusalem itself![3]

The inevitable outcome was a series of uneven and disorganized battles. Ultimately, these poorly trained and disjointed forces succumbed to the highly organized, well-trained Zionist militias, bolstered by British military and political support.

These failures significantly tarnished the reputation of the Arab Liberation Army's leadership. Leaders once celebrated with widespread admiration prior to the Nakba[4] became subjects of doubt and even accusations of betrayal afterward.[5] A thorough analysis of their actions requires a dedicated and detailed study.

What remains certain, however, is that the leadership of the Arab Liberation Army bears a considerable share of the responsibility for the loss of Palestine and Jerusalem. Their treatment of Abd al-Qadir al-Hussieni in his most desperate hours

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[1] I heard this from the renowned thinker Dr. Munir Shafiq, a native of Jerusalem who was fourteen years old at the time of the Nakba and is a researcher in Palestinian history. However, I have not found this information documented in the sources I have reviewed.

[2] Arif al-Arif, vol.1, 198-99.

[3] Mustafa al-Siba'i, pp.29-30.

[4] In all the sources I have reviewed, those from before the Nakba all praise Taha al-Hashimi and Fawzi al-Qawuqji.

[5] See, for example, Mustafa al-Siba'i, pp.27-27, 36; Abdullah Azzam, *Hamas: al-Judhūr wa al-Mīthāq* in *al-Dhakhā'ir al-Ī'zām*, vol.1, p.834.

epitomized their failures. In their final meeting, they refused to provide him with weapons. Incensed, he turned to Ismail Safwat and Taha al-Hashimi, declaring, "You are traitors, you are criminals, and history will record that you lost Palestine."[1] He left that meeting fully aware that his fate was martyrdom—and so it was.

Sheikh Mustafa al-Sibāʿī, who led the Muslim Brotherhood volunteers from Syria, concluded that the Arab Liberation Army was established not to engage in meaningful combat but to pacify the inflamed Arab sentiment. He noted that the Liberation Army did not participate in a single serious battle in Palestine, its leaders lacked awareness of the true situation on the ground, and its primary mission was to dismantle the Holy Jihad Organization led by Abd al-Qadir al-Hussieni.[2]

Additionally, others have argued that the Arab Liberation Army functioned as a tool to withhold weapons, aid, and donations from the Palestinian people. It also served to absorb the energy and enthusiasm of Arab youth volunteers, redirecting their efforts toward implementing the partition plan.[3]

Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the people of Palestine, along with the volunteers, managed to retain control of 82% of Palestinian land prior to the entry of the Arab armies.[4]

The Arab Armies

Britain prohibited the Arab armies from entering Palestine before the scheduled withdrawal of British forces on May 15, 1948. The armies adhered to this timeline, even though many key cities were abandoned by the British before this date and subsequently taken over by the Zionists. As a result, the Holy Jihad forces and

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[1] Arif al-Arif, vol.1, 160-61; Qāsim al-Rīmāwī, pp.372-73.
[2] Mustafa al-Siba'i, p.36.
[3] Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, p.147.
[4] Muhsin Saleh, *al-Qadiyah al-Filistīniyah*, p.61.

the Arab Liberation Army faced extremely harsh conditions in the face of this British-Zionist collusion.

It is worth noting that the Arab states did not decide to deploy their armies until May 12, 1948, a mere two days before the British withdrawal. This delay highlights the absence of a genuine commitment to intervene from the outset. Realistically, what could be achieved in just two days in terms of mobilization and strategic planning for war? Moreover, "the total number of Arab forces did not exceed 25,000 fighters, while the Israeli Defense Forces (the name adopted by the military of the newly established state) initially numbered 35,000 soldiers. During the war, both the Arabs and Israelis reinforced their troops. However, the Arab forces never came close to matching the Israeli numbers, which reached 65,000 soldiers by mid-July and peaked at over 96,000 in December 1948."[1]

Moreover, the disparity in armament and training was overwhelmingly in favor of the Zionist forces. The Zionist army benefited from British military training and weaponry, as well as significant combat experience gained in major conflicts such as World War II. In contrast, the Arab armies were poorly equipped and inadequately trained, consisting of nascent forces operating under foreign domination. These armies represented states with only superficial independence, lacking true sovereignty or the resources necessary for sustained military engagement.[2]

The Zionist militias held a significant advantage in terms of information, having lived and trained on the land. Their intelligence networks had been gathering data on the terrain and population for 30 years, enabling them to develop detailed plans

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[1] Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, p.343 [Arabic Ed.].

[2] Mahmoud Al-Sabbagh, who led the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood volunteers in Palestine, recounts that the Egyptian Western Desert and other locations that had witnessed battles during World War II were filled with abandoned weapons and ammunition from that era. These vast quantities, he noted, could have supplied the Arab armies for five years of fighting if they had the will to utilize them. See Mahmoud Al-Sabbagh, *The Truth About the Secret Organization and Its Role in the Muslim Brotherhood Movement*, p. 170.

for seizing villages. In stark contrast, the Arab armies lacked even the most rudimentary knowledge of the conditions in Palestine. Mahmoud Al-Sabbagh, commander of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood volunteers, recounts that when he requested maps from the Egyptian army leadership, they supplied him with outdated maps from 30 years prior.[1] These maps were entirely useless, as the landscape had changed drastically with the construction of new roads, settlements, and Jewish infrastructure. As a result, the volunteers were forced to gather intelligence from scratch.

Moreover, the Arab armies suffered from a lack of political, financial, and military support, unlike the Zionist forces, which enjoyed robust backing from the great powers. Politically, the Zionists received support through international organizations and even within the corridors of Arab rulers. Financially, they capitalized on open sea routes that facilitated the uninterrupted flow of Jewish capital. Militarily, reinforcements and assistance were readily accessible when needed.

Finally, these armies lacked even the most basic level of trust, coordination, or a unified sense of purpose in battle. One British historian observed, "Had the Arab intervention been characterized by even a modest degree of coordination, advance planning, a semblance of confidence, and a shared goal, the Arab forces might have achieved victory. Instead, the Arabs entered Palestine fighting each other more than they fought the Jewish state."[2]

This lack of organization led to absurd and almost unbelievable situations. For instance, the Iraqi army was deployed in a mountainous region equipped with tanks that were ineffective in such terrain, while the Egyptian army was fighting in open areas without any tanks. Similarly, the Iraqi army had 25-pound artillery

[1] Mahmoud Al-Sabbagh, p.177.
[2] Eugene Rogan, p.335.

pieces but no ammunition, whereas the Egyptian army had ammunition for such artillery but no guns to use it with![1]

These stark disparities in strength were enough to decisively shift the balance of any battle. Even an army filled with enthusiasm, dedication, and bravery would be expected to face a crushing defeat under such circumstances. How much worse would the outcome be when these same armies were burdened with additional internal failures and causes of collapse?

The 1948 war was one of the most tragic and peculiar conflicts, epitomizing the adage "you don't know whether to laugh or cry!" Beyond the already dire circumstances, there were further ironic and catastrophic factors, including:

1. Leadership under the Jordanian Army: The Arab armies were subordinated to the Jordanian army, even though the King of Jordan had accepted the partition plan. How could someone who endorsed the partition lead a battle against it, particularly when his objective was to annex the Arab-designated territories to his kingdom?

2. British Command of the Jordanian Army: The Jordanian army itself was commanded by British officers, with Glubb Pasha, a British officer closely connected to the Zionists, at its helm. Thus, the Arab armies that entered Palestine to liberate it from Zionist control were, paradoxically, under the leadership of a British officer.

3. British-Armed Arab Armies: The primary Arab armies—Egyptian, Iraqi, and Jordanian—were armed with British weapons and ammunition. These armies had been established during British occupation, and their weaponry was supplied with Britain's full knowledge and careful calculation, ensuring that it would not constitute a genuine threat to the Zionists.

4. The Arab armies strictly followed the political directives issued by politicians who were themselves subservient to the

[1] Mahmoud Shīth Khattāb, *Irādat al-Qitāl fī al-Jihād al-Islāmi* (*The Will to Fight in Islamic Jihad*), p.39.

British occupiers. Their actions were dictated by orders: they advanced when commanded and retreated when instructed, without strategic battlefield planning for either movement.[1] At times when the situation turned in their favor, the United Nations would intervene to impose a ceasefire, which the Arab governments and armies quickly adhered to. This pause allowed the Zionists to regroup and strengthen, returning after the truce with greater numbers and better equipment. Meanwhile, the Arab armies remained immobilized and paralyzed, bound by the terms of the truce.

5. Many of these armies treated the Palestinian population as a liability rather than a supportive base. It was common for soldiers to enter villages and confiscate weapons under the pretext of assuming responsibility for the village's defense and ensuring no arms remained behind them. However, when these armies were defeated by Zionist militias, the villages were left defenseless, forcing residents to flee in fear of massacres.[2]

6. As previously noted, Palestinian resistance forces often preferred that official armies refrain from direct involvement in the conflict. Instead, they advocated for Arab states to provide financial and military support to the local population, who were more familiar with the terrain. This approach would also prevent the Zionists from exploiting the conflict on the global stage to garner further financial and political support by portraying themselves as a small, vulnerable state under attack by larger and better-equipped Arab armies—a narrative that was, to begin with, untrue.[3]

Thus, it is crucial to anticipate how a conflict might unfold between two parties operating under such conditions.

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[1] Ahmad Mansūr, *Aḥmad Yāsīn: Shāhid ʿalā ʿAṣr al-Intifāḍah* (*Ahmad Yasin: A Witness on the Intifada*), p.39.
[2] History has proven the validity of this stance. Also, see Ahmad Mansur, p.37.
[3] Ibid., p.38.

King Abdullah of Jordan earned a reputation as a "Zionist ally," with Ben-Gurion describing him as a "wise ruler."[1] He held numerous secret meetings with Zionist leaders,[2] during which he assured them that he would not wage war against them. He portrayed this promise as an unbreakable pledge from a Bedouin Hashemite king, likening it to a vow given to a woman—sacred and irrevocable.[3]

Furthermore, Jordan's participation in the 1948 war was orchestrated in a covert meeting in London on February 17, 1948. This meeting brought together Jordanian Prime Minister Tawfiq Abu Al-Huda, Glubb Pasha, the British commander of the Jordanian army, and British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin.[4] King Abdullah's ambitions extended beyond annexing the portion of Palestine designated for the Arabs. His betrayal reached such heights that he collaborated with Lebanese Christians to establish a Christian state in Lebanon in exchange for incorporating the predominantly Muslim regions of the country into his own rule.[5]

The Arab armies' strategy was initially formulated in Amman, only to be altered, revised, and ultimately reverted to its original form. These repeated changes came after the armies had already begun advancing based on the modified plans, resulting in confusion and fragmented efforts. This disarray not only fueled mistrust but also left the uncoordinated and poorly unified forces as easy targets for the organized and well-prepared Zionist militias they faced.

Adding to the chaos, Glubb Pasha deliberately withheld Jordanian forces from entering Jerusalem, providing the Zionists with a critical opportunity to secure control of the city and shift

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[1] Menachem Begin, p.334.

[2] Abdullah al-Tall, *Kārithat Filistīn: Mudhakkirāt ʿAbdullah al-Tell Qāʾid Maʿrakat al-Quds*, p.64 ff; *Harb Filistīn: al-Riwāyah al-Israʾīliyah al-Rasmiyah*, p.224; *Tāha al-Hāshimī*, vol.2, p.180.

[3] Golda Meir, *Itirāfāt Golda Meir* (*Confessions of Golda Meir*), p.176 ff.; Abdullah al-Tall, p.66 ff.

[4] Mary Wilson, p.12.

[5] Tāha al-Hāshimī, vol.2, p182.

the balance of the conflict in their favor. This led to a series of violent and grueling days, now remembered as the "Five Red Days" in Jerusalem.

Consequently, the Zionists seized West Jerusalem, effectively nullifying the UN partition plan, which had designated the city as an internationally governed zone. This takeover also triggered the forced displacement of approximately 60,000 Palestinians, compounding the tragedy of the conflict.

The actions of the Jordanian army were neither a confrontation with the Zionists nor an attempt to liberate the occupied territories. Instead, they were focused on implementing the partition plan by capturing areas of the West Bank to annex them to the Kingdom of Jordan. In effect, the army was carrying out the plan to establish Israel as outlined by international powers and as agreed upon between King Abdullah, the Zionists, and the British. Some sources even document instances where the Jordanian army directly handed over positions to the Zionist forces, one by one.[1]

The Jordanian army, including its British officers, actively thwarted attempts to capture the Old City of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque. British policy at the time was concerned that the loss of Al-Aqsa Mosque to the Zionists could incite widespread anger among Muslims in the Arab world and in India.[2]

The Egyptian army, which entered from the south, was ordered to advance directly toward Jerusalem. The Zionist forces, offering no resistance, allowed them to pass. However, as the Egyptian forces neared Jerusalem, they were ambushed by troops from the settlements they had left behind—one of the simplest military traps, so obvious that even a child could have avoided it. The Egyptian army was scattered, with some units surrounded and its movements paralyzed. Later, orders for withdrawal were given, and the retreat was carried out in a difficult and protracted manner,

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[1] Abdullah Azzam, *al-Dhakhā'ir al-Īẓām*, vol.1, p.835.
[2] Munir Shafiq, *Min Jamr ilā Jamr: Safahāt min Mudhakkirāt Munīr Shafiq*, pp.49-50.

even though it would have been far simpler for the army to carve out its own escape route by engaging the Israelis with gunfire.[1]

These armies left an indelible mark on the memory of the Palestinians, with certain moments deeply ingrained, such as the recurring response from the Iraqi army whenever the Palestinians called for help: "*Maako Awamir*" (*We have no orders*), meaning, "*We are not authorized to assist you*."[2]

While some units of these armies demonstrated courage, fought fiercely, and engaged in notable battles, these were often the ones who defied political directives or were compelled by battlefield realities to act independently of higher command.[3] Unfortunately, whatever victories these fighters achieved were ultimately undone by the Arab regimes themselves, through orders for withdrawal, changes to the strategic plan, halting advances, adhering to ceasefire agreements, or even imprisoning the fighters—such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt[4]—or prosecuting Iraqi leaders who refused to obey the withdrawal orders.[5]

The first phase of the fighting was the most favorable for the Arabs and the most disastrous for the Israelis, despite all that has been previously noted. The Israelis were thrown into chaos, having to fight on multiple fronts at once. At this critical moment, political intervention came in the form of a United Nations resolution, calling for a ceasefire for a set period, accompanied by an arms embargo. The Arab leaders adhered to the ceasefire without hesitation. However, the Israelis exploited the truce to bolster their ranks and resupply their forces in direct violation of the UN resolution. By the time the first ceasefire ended, the Zionists had regained control of the situation. The fighting resumed, and they took the northern regions, defeating the Syrian and Lebanese

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[1] Ahmad Mansur, p.36.
[2] Abdullah Azzam, vol.1, pp.835, 847; Ahmad Jibril, *Dhākirat al-Tawrah*, p.217.
[3] Some of these were acts of heroism that seemed almost superhuman. A prime example is Ahmed Mansour, pp.35-36.
[4] Mahmoud al-Sabbagh, p.183.
[5] Abdullah Azzam, vol.1, p.834.

armies. They also captured the cities of Lydda and Ramla from the Jordanian army and turned their focus to the Egyptian front in the south. Subsequently, the United Nations imposed another long ceasefire, lasting three months (from July 19 to October 14). The Israelis used this period to further reinforce their forces and replenish their supplies. They continued to push the Syrian and Lebanese forces back to the north, and the Egyptian forces south, ultimately capturing Egyptian territory near the Gulf of Aqaba, specifically the village of Umm al-Rashrash. Following this, borders between the forces were demarcated by ceasefire agreements, effectively establishing Israel as a permanent reality on the ground.

Meanwhile, the Egyptian authorities seized the weapons and equipment collected by the volunteers,[1] effectively preventing any continued resistance after the defeat of the Arab armies.

Thus, Palestine fell. The role of the collaborators in this tragedy was as significant as that of the Zionists or the occupiers themselves. As Sheikh Abdullah Azzam aptly stated, "In just five months, the Jews gained five times what they had seized in the past fifty years."[2]

The ultimate toll of the Nakba was the destruction of 531 Palestinian villages and towns,[3] resulting in Israel seizing nearly 78% of Palestinian land. This means Israel gained more territory through military conquest than the 55% allocated to it by the UN partition plan. It was as if the Arab armies were fighting not against the Israelis, but in support of their cause, unwittingly advancing the Zionist project!

Furthermore, the war brought the devastating tragedy of refugees, with 58% of the Palestinian population (805,076 people) being displaced. For many, fleeing was the only available option, as they were unarmed, exhausted people facing heavily armed and ruthless Zionist militias. At the time, the prevailing belief among

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[1] Mahmoud al-Sabbāgh, p.89 ff.
[2] Abdullah Azzam, vol.1, p.837.
[3] Ilan Pappe, p.3, Salman Abu Sitta, *Haqq al-'Awdah* (*The Right of Return*), p.8.

the Palestinians was that the Arab states would not allow this injustice to stand. They hoped the Arab armies would intervene, expel the Zionist militias, and restore them to their homes. Their departure from their villages was not viewed as surrender or defeat but as a decision driven by two factors: their own weakness and helplessness on one hand, and the hope inspired by the promises of the Arab states on the other.[1] It is crucial to note that half of the refugees were expelled from their villages before the Arab armies even entered, meaning that the refugee crisis was not a direct result of the war but of the Zionist invasion and its numerous massacres, with the support of British complicity.

The refugees dispersed in three directions: the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and destinations beyond Palestine, such as Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and other countries. The remaining parts of Palestine—Gaza (1.3% of Palestine's total area) and the West Bank (21.5%)—were swiftly annexed by neighboring states instead of being left to the Palestinians. Egypt annexed the Gaza Strip, while Jordan took control of the West Bank. Notably, the Jordanian regime relinquished Lydda (al-Ludd) and Ramla, while the Egyptian regime surrendered parts of the Gaza Strip that had not been taken by the Israelis in combat but were instead ceded during negotiations by the Egyptian representative.[2] Additionally, Egypt gave up the village of Umm al-Rashrash, providing Israel with a maritime outlet to the Red Sea.

The annexation of the West Bank by Jordan was not opposed by most Palestinians. On the contrary, some viewed it as a form of protection to ensure that the remaining Palestinian territories would not be left unclaimed, as had happened after World War I when Ottoman protection dissolved. Similarly, just as Palestinian leaders and dignitaries at the First Arab Congress in Jerusalem once called for the annexation of Palestine to Syria, the annexation of the West Bank—despite being partially engineered by King

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[1] Salah Khalaf, p.32.

[2] Sulaiman Abu Sittah, *Kaif Qadamat Isrâ'il Qitâ' Gazzah fi Itifaqiya Sirriyah* (*How Israel Encroached on the Gaza Strip in a Secret Agreement*)? Al-Hayah Newspapers, London, March 28, 2009.

Abdullah—was not fundamentally rejected by Palestinian notables and leaders.

Those who were apprehensive about or opposed to the annexation were primarily concerned about King Abdullah's policies, given his reputation as a steadfast ally of the British. Their opposition was rooted not in resistance to Arab or Islamic unity but in distrust of the King's motives.

Palestine between 1948 and 1967

Israel's Position

Following the establishment of the Zionist state, it was immediately recognized by major international powers, including the then-global superpowers in the United States and Russia, followed by European nations. From its inception, Israel wasted no time in consolidating its position. One of Ben-Gurion's earliest moves was to declare Jerusalem the capital of Israel, a decision that defied the wishes of its international allies, including those who supported the Zionists. Nevertheless, Ben-Gurion pressed forward, relocating the government headquarters and ministries to Jerusalem, disregarding the objections of his patrons.

Only the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remained in Tel Aviv, as embassies and diplomatic missions continued to operate there. Consequently, Jerusalem became Israel's de facto capital from the very beginning, serving as the country's administrative center, while Tel Aviv retained its status as the official capital. The transition was swift; ministers hurried to move to Jerusalem, and Golda Meir, for instance, had to temporarily reside in a room on a rooftop until a suitable ministerial residence was prepared.

On the political stage, Israel worked relentlessly to secure its foothold and cement its existence as an undeniable reality. From that point forward, security concerns became its overarching priority, shaping its policies and actions.

In the political sphere, Israel made relentless efforts to establish and solidify its presence, striving to assert itself as an undeniable reality on the world stage. From its inception, security concerns were the cornerstone of its policies.

Having been founded on the displacement of a substantial portion of the land's original inhabitants, Israel spared no effort in

instilling fear and intimidation among these displaced populations. This was done to deter any attempts at reclaiming their land or even infiltrating territories now within Israel's borders.

Surrounded by an Arab world that overwhelmingly rejected its existence and sought its eradication, Israel focused on demonstrating its military strength and its capacity to defend itself. Over time, the fractured state of the Arab nations emboldened Israel to go beyond consolidation, aspiring to expand its influence and even annex additional territories, including the remaining parts of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza.

To this end, Israel launched numerous attacks on the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, and Jordan, resulting in the deaths of many civilians, police officers, and soldiers. It even resorted to mutilating the bodies of those captured attempting to infiltrate the territories it had occupied in 1948.[1]

One of Israel's most significant and far-reaching military actions was its large-scale assault on the Sinai Peninsula in 1956, deep within Egyptian territory. This operation initiated a conflict that provided a pretext for British and French intervention after President Gamal Abdel Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. Capitalizing on what it perceived as weaknesses and corruption in Nasser's regime, Israel advanced into Sinai. Meanwhile, British and French forces swiftly occupied the Suez Canal zone, delivering a heavy blow to the Egyptian army.

This aggression, known as the Suez Crisis or the Tripartite Aggression, was met with strong opposition from both the United States and the Soviet Union. Both superpowers resisted the resurgence of old colonial powers—Britain and France—in a region they sought to influence themselves. The United States exerted immense diplomatic pressure against the Tripartite Aggression, ultimately forcing all parties to withdraw.

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[1] For further details, refer to the report: *Israel's Violations of the Armistice Lines*, published by the Arab League Office in New York and released in Cairo in 1955. The report covers the years 1949–1954.

Despite the eventual retreat of British and French forces, Israel managed to secure several significant and strategic advantages from the conflict, cementing its position in the region. Among the most significant gains are:

1. Demonstrating its capability for successful surprise attacks: The assault on Egypt, the largest Arab country with the largest Arab army, marked the first test of the July Revolution's military regime. This regime had claimed to have launched the revolution for several reasons, chief among them the Palestinian cause. However, the war exposed its inability to deliver on such promises.

2. Securing the right to freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba: This crucial waterway connects Israel to the southern hemisphere. While Israel already controlled the northern tip of the Gulf at Eilat, its southern outlet was blocked by two Egyptian islands. Through this war, Israel secured the right to free navigation in exchange for withdrawing from occupied territory—a concession largely unnoticed by the Egyptian public.

3. Stationing international forces on the Egyptian-Israeli border: This deployment effectively prevented Egypt from launching a surprise attack against Israel. Any planned Egyptian offensive would require notifying or requesting the departure of these international forces, rendering an attack against internationally protected troops highly improbable.

Israel also came close to placing Gaza under international supervision. However, widespread protests led by Gazan Islamists ultimately ensured the Strip remained under Egyptian sovereignty.[1]

Through the 1956 war, Israel strengthened its regional power and influence, increased its strategic significance, and boldly displayed its expansionist ambitions. The war revealed that Israel was not satisfied with the territorial gains of 1948. The relative ease of capturing Sinai further emboldened Israel, paving the way for its actions in 1967.

[1] Ahmed Mansour, pp.48-49.

During this period, one of Israel's most dangerous strategies was its infiltration of Arab regimes through agents placed in highly sensitive positions. Among the most prominent were Eli Cohen, who ascended to the rank of Vice President in Syria, and Ashraf Marwan, the son-in-law of Gamal Abdel Nasser and his personal information secretary. Both played pivotal and decisive roles in delivering critical intelligence to Israel during the 1967 war (often referred to as the Second Catastrophe) and the October War of 1973.

The State of Palestine Between the Two Catastrophes

Under British occupation, a distinct Palestinian identity began to crystallize within Palestinian society. However, this period also witnessed a marked decline in collective attachment to Islamic identity and solidarity, which can be traced to several factors:

1. The decline of Islamic identity across the Muslim world following the fall of the Islamic Caliphate. This was compounded by the occupation of most Muslim-majority nations by foreign powers or their subjection to direct foreign influence.

2. The ascendancy of secularism throughout the region, which was divided between two dominant ideologies: socialist communism aligned with the Soviet-led Eastern Bloc, and capitalist liberalism aligned with the U.S.-led Western Bloc.

3. The rise of nationalism, as the broader Islamic world fragmented into newly formed nation-states. These states adopted distinct flags, constitutions, and legal frameworks, fostering unique national identities. To assert their independence, they often sought to construct historical narratives by exploring antiquities and ancient heritage, thereby crafting distinct national histories.

These three elements—the absence of the Islamic Caliphate, the spread of secularism, and the entrenchment of nationalism—interacted in a mutually reinforcing manner. Each was supported and perpetuated by the overarching influence of foreign powers, further entrenching their collective impact.

However, this general weakening of attachment to the overarching Islamic bond did not, in the case of Palestinians, indicate a drift toward a purely national identity detached from the broader Arab identity. The Palestinian people continued to see the liberation of their homeland as a shared Arab obligation. They believed that Arab efforts in Palestine were not acts of charity or assistance but rather a natural duty. Several factors contributed to the growth and reinforcement of this Arab identity, the most notable being:

1. A foundation in deep and enduring connections: The Palestinian population was interwoven with neighboring communities, with families often split across Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. Landowners, for instance, frequently lived in Lebanon or Syria while their properties were in Palestine. These realities rendered the notion of distinct national borders virtually meaningless, with no clear geographical or demographic separation between what became modern Palestine and its neighboring states. Additionally, beyond the fact that Palestine is a sacred Islamic cause that resonates throughout the Muslim world, many Arab volunteers who fought in Palestine did so out of a direct sense of duty to defend their own families, lands, and dignity.[1]

2. The political and military engagement of Arab states, particularly those bordering Palestine: These nations intervened in the Palestinian struggle under the banner of Arab unity, presenting the liberation of Palestine and the fight against Zionism as their collective responsibility. In doing so, they often restricted

[1] It is important to clarify a crucial point: when we use terms like "the Arabs" and "they came," we are influenced by the dominant cultural framework and the modern nationalist perspective. At that time, these individuals were neither regarded as, nor did they see themselves as, "Arabs" in a way that distinguished them from "Palestinians." They did not perceive their journey to the land of jihad as "coming" to aid a separate people, nor did the Palestinians view it in such terms. Nevertheless, we are sometimes compelled to employ these expressions to communicate with a contemporary audience. Neither we nor they can fully escape the influence of the prevailing ideologies that shape our current reality or the ways these ideologies have molded our language and terminology.

Palestinian self-defense efforts, asserting that the cause was a pan-Arab one rather than an individual struggle. They claimed that the conflict required organized armies rather than independent militias, as previously discussed. This narrative was championed by Arab leaders, echoed through state media, and reinforced by intellectuals. It resonated deeply with a society already drained and weakened over decades, where the appeal of hopeful rhetoric easily took hold in the hearts of the oppressed and disenfranchised.

1. During the Nakba era, this rhetoric reached its zenith. Secular Arab nationalism attained the height of its influence with the rise of Nasserism in Egypt and the Baʿath Party in Syria and Iraq. This Arabist narrative emphasized the unity of the Arab nation, the liberation of Palestine, and the expulsion of Zionist militias. The Palestinian cause was prominently highlighted in the first proclamation of the Egyptian military coup (the July 23, 1952). At that time, Egypt held an almost monopolistic control over media in the Arab world through its radio and press, fueling widespread enthusiasm and immense hope among Palestinians and the broader Arab public. Most significantly, this rhetoric reinforced the Palestinians' sense of belonging to a broader Arab nationalist identity.

Yet, beyond the lofty slogans and promises, the reality diverged sharply—and often opposed this narrative. Arab regimes began to manipulate the Palestinian cause as a political lever, transforming it into a tool to bolster their own power. While the previous era was marked by British efforts to obstruct the emergence of a unified Palestinian leadership, this period saw similar tactics employed now by the Arab regimes themselves.

The Arab Higher Committee, under the leadership of Haj Amin al-Husseini, sought to establish a Palestinian government to address the political vacuum left by the British withdrawal. This effort, made in the lead-up to the Nakba, was rejected by Arab governments, with King Abdullah of Jordan being the most adamant opponent. Abdullah, intent on expanding his kingdom,

harbored longstanding resentment over being granted a small, barren territory despite being Sharif Hussein's eldest son.

Following the Nakba and the defeat of the Arab armies, the Arab Higher Committee proclaimed the establishment of the All-Palestine Government on September 23, 1948. While most Arab countries recognized this government, Jordan notably did not. On October 1, 1948, the committee convened a legislative council in Gaza, presided over by Haj Amin al-Husseini, to assert the government's legitimacy.

However, the Egyptian government soon intervened, forcibly relocating Haj Amin al-Husseini, government officials, and several council members to Cairo, effectively taking control of the Gaza Strip. This rendered the government purely symbolic—a government in exile devoid of any real authority. In Cairo, al-Husseini faced strict surveillance, and the Arab Higher Committee's headquarters were heavily monitored. The role of the head of the All-Palestine Government was ultimately reduced to serving as Palestine's representative in the Arab League.

In this manner, the Arab states inadvertently enabled Israel's territorial expansion, allowing it to annex areas beyond those allocated in the Partition Plan.[1] The Egyptian and Jordanian regimes, while holding control over Gaza and the West Bank, made concerted efforts to suppress any resistance operations or Palestinian attempts to infiltrate "Israeli" borders. Their security apparatuses infiltrated nascent militant groups,[2] even in the face of continuous Israeli aggressions and violations.

An Arab League report detailed the official measures to curb infiltration, including the punishment of resistance fighters through imprisonment, fines, exile, and various forms of physical abuse, such as beatings and torture.[3] These measures were compounded by the regimes' media campaigns aimed at

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[1] Salah Khalaf, p.65.
[2] Ibid., pp.81, 84, 87.
[3] Report: *Israeli Violations of the Ceasefire Lines*; Salah Khalaf, p.83 ff.; Ahmed Mansour, pp.75-76.

discrediting and demonizing the resistance.[1] From the very beginning, Arab regimes actively protected Israel and pursued its opponents.[2]

Under these circumstances, it would be naive to ask whether the Arab regimes had even considered mobilizing their armies or launching a military response to Israeli incursions and violations—let alone contemplating the liberation of Palestine.[3]

If the Arab governments surrendered Palestine to the Zionists and facilitated their control, this was not merely an oversight or an unintended mistake. Rather, the actions of these governments regarding Palestine reflect a deliberate and comprehensive betrayal. The states that were claimed to have "achieved independence" and "freed themselves" from colonial rule behaved no differently than they did under foreign occupation.

Palestinian society underwent a profound upheaval—political, economic, and social—following the Nakba and the subsequent waves of displacement that reshaped its very fabric. What was once a society weakened and drained by British occupation now faced a new reality: a community shocked, fragmented, and dispersed to the extent that its cohesiveness was under question.

The disastrous displacement gave rise to new social classes and strata, particularly in refugee camps and surrounding urban areas. Many Palestinians sought refuge in neighboring countries, while others migrated to the Gulf states, which were undergoing an oil boom and embarking on significant development projects. For

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1 Salah Khalaf, pp.82-83; Ahmad Masur, p.75.

2 Sheikh Abdullah Azzam recounts a telling story about a neighbor from his village, Silat al-Harithiya, who saw Israelis had reached his garden. He went to report the incident to the Jordanian army center in Jenin but was arrested, imprisoned, and brought before a military court. He was only released after claiming to the judge that he had been asleep and dreaming, and upon waking, he believed it to be real. Azzam also shares other stories that reveal the cruelty of the Jordanian authorities and their complicity. See *al-Dhakhā̆r al-Ī̆ẓām*.

3 In fact, the report from the Arab League Office in New York confirmed that "none of the four joint committees of the United Nations have found any evidence to condemn any Arab government for planning, organizing, or launching an attack on Israeli territory." (p.4)

these Palestinians, the Gulf offered a glimmer of hope and an escape from poverty, while the region benefited from their skilled labor across various sectors.

Education became a cornerstone of Palestinian resilience, emerging as the primary path to upward mobility in the absence of land, property, or trade. This emphasis led Palestinians to become one of the most educated populations in the Arab world, with many earning degrees from Arab, European, and American universities.[1]

However, this sweeping socio-economic transformation, coupled with the policies of Arab states—particularly Egypt and Jordan—severely hindered Palestinian resistance, both politically and militarily. Politically, the Arab Higher Committee faded into irrelevance, and the once-prominent Haj Amin al-Husseini saw his influence wane. He lived in virtual confinement in Cairo before relocating to Lebanon in 1958.

On the military resistance front, efforts were limited to small operations carried out by individuals or small groups attempting to infiltrate borders or target soldiers. Despite their modest resources, they achieved significant results, reportedly causing around 1,200 Israeli fatalities over seven years (1949–1956). However, these operations ceased when the Nasserist regime tightened border security and prohibited attacks against Israel following the humiliating defeat in the 1956 war.

Indeed, "the treacherous and bloody record of what these regimes committed against Gaza's youth, whenever they attempted to organize resistance to liberate their homeland, has yet to be documented. Many of these young men languished in Nasser's prisons and detention centers until the 1956 war, when these files were handed over to the Israeli occupation forces."[2]

Amid widespread despair and a complete political vacuum, young Palestinians took the initiative in 1957 to establish a new

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[1] Salah Khalaf, p.39; Ahmad Jibril, pp.35-36; Musin Saleh, p.71.

[2] Jalal Kishk, *Thawrat Unyun al-Amerikiyah* (*The American Revolution of July*), p.93.

movement: Fatah. The organization was founded in Kuwait, which at the time had become home to a growing Palestinian community. For nine years, Fatah quietly organized and prepared, ultimately launching its first military operation in December 1964.

Initially, Fatah drew its foundation from Islamic principles and relied heavily on the youth of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, over time, it evolved into a secular movement—a transformation shaped by various circumstances and factors that we will explore later, God willing.

One of the limitations of this brief study is its inability to fully address the refugee issue—a profound tragedy that lies at the heart of Palestinian society's experience. Families were torn apart, scattered across different countries and even continents, shaped by the varying circumstances, levels of education, talents, and opportunities available to everyone. Refugees endured widespread humiliation, marginalization, and exclusion in every Arab country they sought refuge in, often treated worse than other foreigners, let alone as equals or citizens.

No Arab state fully harnessed Palestinian talents or integrated them as equals within their societies. Instead, their treatment ranged from inadequate to outright discriminatory, impacting every facet of life: from travel, education, and healthcare to employment, housing, childhood experiences, and even the burial of their dead. During periods of political unrest and war, refugees frequently became scapegoats, subjected to immense suffering and forced to bear the heaviest burdens.

While it can't be denied that a comprehensive understanding of the Palestinian cause is incomplete without a deep exploration of the refugee crisis, this study's attempt to be succinct and focused compels us to limit ourselves to this brief acknowledgment, leaving this painful chapter largely unexplored.

The State of Arab Countries After the 1948 Nakba

The Nakba unleashed a violent wave of coups, assassinations, and revolutions across the region, particularly in the surrounding

states. Interpretations of the Nakba and its causes varied, giving rise to divergent visions for the future. This internal upheaval, fueled by widespread Arab and Islamic outrage, overlapped with another significant development: Western influence in the form of the U.S. and Soviet Union stepping in to replace British and French dominance in the region. The area became a theater for competing powers, filled with actors, adventurers, interwoven organizations, and conflicting policies. Local factions secured external backers, while foreign powers found fertile ground for intervention and exploitation.

The years following the Nakba were among the most turbulent, dynamic, and chaotic in the Arab world, particularly in the Levant, Egypt, and Iraq. In the end, the victorious powers of World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union, emerged as the dominant forces in the region.

The Palestinian issue remains a stark reminder that the coups and transformations within the Arab world failed to bring meaningful change for the benefit of the Arab people or to free them from foreign influence. Despite the shift from monarchies to republics, the replacement of kings, and the turnover of presidents, the stance on Palestine remained unchanged. No Arab leader dared to take real action against Israel or to make a genuine effort to liberate Palestine or support its people.[1]

Given the limitations of space, this discussion will focus on the conditions in the surrounding countries—Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon—whose influence on the Palestinian cause has been particularly significant.

Egypt

Before the dust of the 1948 war had settled, the Egyptian authorities launched a sweeping crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood—the most powerful force among the volunteers fighting for Palestine. The government issued a decision to

[1] Salah Khalaf, p.65.

dissolve the organization, confiscate its assets, and arrest its leaders and many members, including those actively supporting the Egyptian army on the battlefield.[1] The regime even adopted the slogan: *"The Brotherhood is more dangerous than the Zionists."[2] Shortly after this campaign, Hassan al-Banna, the group's founder and leader, was assassinated, plunging the Brotherhood into a period of disarray following this brutal blow.

A faction within the Egyptian army, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, later built upon the prior efforts of the Brotherhood, communists, and other groups to stage a military coup and seize power. This coup was part of a U.S.-backed strategy to replace British colonial influence in Egypt—a goal that was ultimately realized. Through this maneuver, Egypt transitioned from British to American dominance.

Despite the Brotherhood's pivotal role in enabling the coup, its members had taken on critical assignments such as besieging the royal palaces in Cairo and Alexandria, the group ultimately faced a devastating betrayal. Abdel Nasser infiltrated its ranks, dismantled its leadership, and dealt it a crushing blow. He consolidated power and ushered in an era of authoritarian rule, marked by widespread oppression, corruption, and stagnation, earning his era the grim moniker: "the age of oppression and defeats."[3]

This period proved harsher than the British occupation it replaced. Abdel Nasser failed to secure a single military victory. He allowed Sudan to secede from Egypt, failed to sustain the brief union with Syria, suffered humiliation in Yemen, and endured two

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[1] Among the most notable books documenting the jihad of the Muslim Brotherhood's volunteer battalions are Kamal Al-Sharif's *The Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestine War*, Hussein Hijazi's *A Group That Redeemed a Nation*, and Mahmoud Al-Sabbagh's *The Truth About the Special Organization and Its Role in the Muslim Brotherhood's Mission*.

[2] Mahmud Sabbagh, p.35.

[3] This is how the Egyptian historian Dr. Ahmed Shalabi described it in the ninth volume of his *Encyclopedia of Islamic History*.

crushing defeats against Israel. By the time of his death, Egypt had lost Sudan, the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula.

In addition to these political and military failures, Egypt spiraled into decline across every sphere—politics, the economy, society, culture, and morality—leaving the nation in a state of profound crisis and stagnation.

Despite the sweeping and passionate rhetoric about liberating Palestine, the "promised state," and similar slogans, Abdel Nasser never seriously contemplated an attack on Israel.[1] Reports even suggest that he considered pursuing peace with Israel but refrained, fearing assassination like King Abdullah of Jordan.[2] In the early years of his rule, he cut the military budget[3] and retained the same military leaders responsible for the defeat in 1956—leaders who would later preside over an even more catastrophic failure in 1967. During this period, the military and other state institutions were mired in corruption and decay, further compounding the nation's woes.

Syria

Syria ushered in an era of military coups in the Arab world, with these coups often serving as instruments for colonial powers. In just one year, Syria witnessed three consecutive military coups: Husni al-Zaĭm's coup (March 1949), Sami al-Hinnawi's coup (August 1949), and Adib al-Shishakli's coup (December 1949).

Adib al-Shishakli initially attempted to govern through a civilian front. However, when this strategy failed, he staged his second coup—the fourth in Syria's history—in November 1951, establishing a totalitarian military regime. This regime lasted until another coup in February 1954, led by Faisal al-Atassi, which ousted al-Shishakli and restored power to civilians. This event marked the beginning of what came to be known as Syria's

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[1] Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, *Qissat al-Suwais: Ākhir al-Maʿārik fi ʿAsr al-ʿAmāliqah* (*The Story of Suez: The Last Battles in the Era of Giants*), p.22.
[2] Golda Meir, p.176.
[3] M. H. Heikal, p.22.

democratic spring, a brief period of four years of relative political openness.

In 1958, Shukri al-Quwatli proposed a union with Egypt. Although Gamal Abdel Nasser initially hesitated, he eventually agreed, leading to the creation of the United Arab Republic—a union between Egypt and Syria under a single banner. However, the union dissolved just three years later, following a military coup in 1961 against the Egyptian administration, which had brought corruption and authoritarianism to Syria.

Nasser's passive response to the coup reflected his broader failure. Through flawed policies and a lack of resolve, he squandered a historic opportunity to unite the two most pivotal Arab nations during a critical juncture in modern history.

In 1963, a military coup orchestrated by the Baʿath Party's Military Committee plunged Syria into an era of rigid and oppressive Baʿathist rule. The situation worsened in 1966 with another internal coup, which ousted the Baʿath Party's old guard and deepened the rift between its factions in Iraq and Syria. This instability culminated in a third internal coup in 1970, led by Hafez al-Assad. Assad dismantled the last remnants of civilian governance and political plurality, ushering in an authoritarian regime widely regarded as one of the darkest chapters in the history of the Levant.

This overview highlights Syria's lack of readiness and capacity to provide meaningful support to the Palestinian cause. On the contrary, Husni al-Zaʿim, leader of the first coup, pursued a peace deal with Israel that included full normalization, the exchange of ambassadors, and the resettlement of 300,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria. However, David Ben-Gurion rejected the proposal, as he sought full control of Lake Tiberias rather than sharing it with Syria and refused to set borders that constrained his broader ambitions for a greater Israel.[1]

[1] Adel Arslan, vol.2, pp.839, 841-42, 846; Eugene Rogan, pp.348-49.

In sharp contrast to the upheaval in Syria and the overthrow of monarchies in Egypt and Iraq, Jordan enjoyed a remarkable degree of stability and continuity. It stood as the only Arab country where the ruling system remained unchanged, with the monarchy enduring under King Abdullah and his descendants. However, this stability was not rooted in popular approval or intrinsic strength—both of which were tenuous at best. Instead, it was upheld by colonial powers determined to preserve it. Jordan's regime proved to be the most compliant and loyal to foreign interests, particularly in relation to Palestine.

Following the conclusion of the 1948 war, King Abdullah assumed control of the West Bank. His deep alignment with the British and Zionists quickly became evident, positioning him as a central figure in the betrayal of Palestine. This treachery was further highlighted by his adversarial relationships with the regimes in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, as well as his enmity with Haj Amin al-Husseini, the most prominent Palestinian leader. Together, these factors intensified opposition to him.

On July 20, 1951, while King Abdullah was praying at Al-Aqsa Mosque, a Jerusalemite assassinated him on the mosque's steps. His assassination marked the first instance of a ruler facing retribution for betraying Palestine.

His grandson, Hussein bin Talal—who would later ascend to the throne—recounted that King Abdullah had foreseen his assassination, a premonition he shared with those close to him. Young Hussein, present during the event, witnessed the tragedy firsthand and was struck by how quickly the king's entourage abandoned him, scattering in the moment of his death. Even the American ambassador, among others, had anticipated such an outcome.[1]

The assassination sent shockwaves through the Arab leadership, instilling fear of a similar fate among other rulers. Gamal Abdel Nasser himself admitted to fearing assassination if

[1] Hussien ben Talal, *My Job is King*, p.36 ff [Arabic edition].

he sought peace with Israel.[1] The Jordanian regime, in response, adopted a more overtly Arab nationalist posture to mask its deeply ingrained betrayals. In hindsight, this dramatic event arguably delayed open Arab normalization with Israel for nearly three decades and Jordanian normalization for about four.

Following Abdullah's assassination, his son Talal, at 42, ascended the throne but was deposed less than a year later, ostensibly due to claims of mental illness. He was subsequently confined to a sanatorium abroad, where he spent over 20 years until his death. The exact circumstances of his removal remain one of the enduring enigmas of modern Arab history. It is widely speculated that Talal's refusal to be as compliant with British interests[2] as his father had been led to a conspiracy against him, orchestrated by General Glubb Pasha (the British commander of the Jordanian army) and Tawfik Abu al-Huda (King Abdullah's pro-British prime minister).

Talal's deposition paved the way for his teenage son, Hussein II, to take the throne at the age of 17. Hussein ruled for nearly half a century, from 1952 to 1999, largely following his grandfather's path of aligning with Israeli interests. As Britain's global influence waned, Hussein shifted his loyalties to the United States. Various sources later revealed that he had been registered as an agent of the CIA, complete with a codename, identification number, and a regular stipend.[3]

The Jordanian regime is widely regarded as one of the most dangerous, cunning, and deceptive among Arab governments. Its origins and circumstances compelled it to adopt a strategy of calculated maneuvering across all its dealings. Several internal and external factors shaped this approach, including:

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[1] Golda Meir, p.176.

[2] This is supported by some accounts attributed to him; see, for example, *Memoir of Amin al-Husseini*, p. 38.

[3] The Washington Post, Feb. 17, 1977. Also, see M. H. Haikal, *Kalām fī al-Siyāsah: Qadāyā wa Rijāl*, p.117 ff and p.133 ff.

1. Fragile foundations: The regime lacks deep social or historical roots in the land it governs, having been established and sustained primarily through British colonial power.

2. Dependence on external support: Jordan governs a small, resource-poor country that could not have maintained its rule without substantial support from British colonial authorities, later shifting its reliance to American and Israeli backing.

3. Arab nationalist aspirations: Although Arab nationalism was initially championed by King Hussein's great-grandfather, Sharif Hussein bin Ali, and was later adopted by his grandfather, King Abdullah bin Hussein, the torch of Arab leadership eventually passed to Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. These larger, resource-rich nations, driven by their leaders' aspirations for regional dominance and their adoption of the Palestinian cause, became adversaries to the Jordanian regime.

4. Contrasting geopolitical alignments: While Egypt, Iraq, and Syria were governed by regimes aligned with socialism, communism, and the Soviet Union, Jordan firmly aligned itself with the United States and the Western bloc. This divergence fostered significant tensions, polarization, and animosity.

5. Palestinian demographic dominance: The Jordanian regime governs a population in which Palestinians form the majority. Before the British occupation and Jordan's creation, familial and tribal connections spanned both sides of the Jordan River. Following the occupation of Palestine, Jordan assumed control of the West Bank and integrated large numbers of displaced Palestinians. This demographic reality has shaped the kingdom's policies and added to its internal and external challenges.

For these reasons, the Jordanian regime has consistently pursued a strategy of deception, manipulation, and maneuvering. While it projects Arab nationalist rhetoric and slogans, its policies and loyalties are firmly aligned with Zionist and American interests. The regime opened its doors and even granted positions to Islamist fugitives fleeing the oppressive regimes of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq—not out of sympathy, but as a calculated move to prevent its

populace from rallying behind leaders like Nasser or others. Simultaneously, it exploited the Palestinian cause, permitting limited and tightly controlled activities—not out of genuine support for jihadist efforts, but to contain, pacify, and channel the fervent energies calling for resistance against Zionism and the liberation of Palestine.

Over time, the regime consolidated its power, systematically curtailing these limited freedoms for both Islamists and Palestinians. As a result, the Jordanian security apparatus became more powerful and formidable than its military, emerging as one of the most efficient and feared intelligence agencies in the Arab world. Unlike the overtly violent methods of security forces in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Algeria, the Jordanian apparatus relied on professionalism, subtlety, and precision.

Through this approach, Jordan has become Israel's most reliable safeguard, sharing with it the longest border—650 kilometers—despite a majority Palestinian population yearning for resistance and the regime's allowance of limited space for Islamist and Palestinian resistance movements. Jordan represents a unique model of neutralizing liberation and Islamic movements, not through overt oppression but through calculated soft containment. However, this does not imply a lack of harshness when opportunities arise; rather, it highlights that cunning, deceit, and calculated manipulation have played a greater role in the regime's strategy than brute force and repression.

The Jordanian model became a convenient excuse for the regimes in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, as well as some Palestinians, to justify their failures by claiming that Jordan was obstructing their efforts to liberate Palestine.[1] While both sides truthfully recount each other's misdeeds, all are complicit, and none among them can claim to be honorable, honest, or innocent.

[1] For King Hussien's stances, see AhmAd al-Shuqeiri, vol.5, p.1392 ff; Hussien bin Talal, *My Job is a King*, pp.204, 212 ff.

From its inception to the moment of writing these lines, the Jordanian regime has remained consistent in its approach.[1] This consistency was aptly summarized by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in his memoirs, where he stated, "I assured him (i.e., King Hussien) that I viewed the survival of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as a vital interest and that, if necessary, we would intervene militarily to prevent its downfall."[2]

The following key conclusions can be drawn from the conduct of Arab states concerning Palestine:

1. Lack of True Unity: These regimes never genuinely pursued Arab unity. Instead, each prioritized consolidating its power and reinforcing its local national identity, despite their lip service to Arab nationalism and slogans like "Unity is the path to liberation." Their words belied their true intentions.

2. Oppression of Palestinian Refugees: These states did not allow the displaced Palestinians in their territories to engage in meaningful efforts toward liberating Palestine. They restricted the natural movement of Palestinian leaders and youth. In fact, Palestinians often faced persecution at the hands of these governments, suffering as much as the native populations, if not more.

3. Exploitation of the Palestinian Cause: Major powers like Egypt, Syria, and Iraq reduced Palestine to a political bargaining chip, using it to serve their own interests. This approach fragmented and divided the Palestinian people, fostering jealousy and rivalry, and encouraging opportunists to vie for leadership at the expense of unity.

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[1] A document published by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* on September 7, 2023; sheds light on a significant historical episode: King Hussein of Jordan reportedly met with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir shortly before the October War of 1973. During this meeting, he is said to have shared confirmed intelligence about Syria's plans to launch an attack on Israel. *Haaretz* highlighted this document as evidence of the deep and strategic ties between King Hussein and Israel.

[2] Benjamin Netanyahu, *Bibi: My Story,* p.374 [eBook], p.296 [paper copy].

4. Absence of Military Action Against Israel: None of these Arab states seriously contemplated waging war against Israel or actively working to liberate Palestine. Instead, each regime focused its military and security forces on securing its own rule and suppressing its people. This period ultimately culminated in the second catastrophe—a disaster even more severe and devastating than the first: the Nakba of 1967.

The 1967 Nakba and the Surge of Israeli Expansion

Nearly six decades after the 1967 war, much about its events and causes remains concealed. The enduring Arab regimes from that period have refrained from releasing their archives, leaving historians dependent on published eyewitness accounts and foreign research.

The 1967 Nakba

One of the most surprising aspects of this war is how Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser appeared to rush into the conflict as though he was fully prepared, only to suffer a crushing defeat that seemed entirely unforeseen. The consequences of the war extended far beyond Egypt, as Israel in a single day (June 5, 1967) captured territories from four Arab states:

1. Egypt: Israel occupied Gaza, previously under Egyptian control, and seized the Sinai Peninsula—a vast area larger than Israel itself and double the size of all Palestine.

2. Syria: Israel took the Golan Heights, a region of immense strategic importance due to its natural fortifications.

3. Jordan: Israel captured the West Bank, which was previously under Jordanian sovereignty.

4. Palestine: What remained of historic Palestine—namely Gaza and the West Bank—was lost. These areas, governed by Egypt and Jordan under the banner of Arab nationalism, were ultimately handed over to Israel. This surrender represents one of the most significant betrayals in modern Arab history.

Egypt and Jordan had ruled Gaza and the West Bank respectively, cloaking their governance in the rhetoric of Arab

nationalism. Yet, after relinquishing these territories to Israel, both regimes shifted to nationalist slogans, abandoning the broader Arab cause. This marked not only a military and political failure but also a pivotal shift in the ideological landscape of the Arab world.

This war, famously known as the Six-Day War, was decisively won in its first six hours, a feat often described as one of the most comprehensive victories in modern military history, drawing parallels to the epochal collapse of the Byzantine Empire to Arab forces.

The conflict began when Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser closed the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping. This move not only marked a significant military escalation but also exposed to Egyptians for the first time that Israeli ships had been traversing their waters since 1956. The closure was soon followed by Nasser's demand for the withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force from the Egypt-Israel border, a clear signal of impending war. Yet, beyond these dramatic gestures, no substantial war preparations had been taken.

Many historians view Nasser's actions as calculated brinkmanship aimed at provoking international intervention to secure political or economic gains. However, his strategy backfired. The withdrawal of UN forces left him without external support or mediation, and he seemed unprepared for the subsequent events.

This lack of foresight and planning left the Egyptian military in a state of paralysis. Its troops were ill-prepared, and reservists were hastily mobilized and deployed to the battlefield without adequate training, clear objectives, or an understanding of the terrain and enemy positions. These factors compounded Egypt's already precarious position, culminating in its swift and decisive defeat.

Nasser's philosopher and spokesperson, Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, noted that Egypt had chosen to absorb the first strike in the 1967 war. However, this decision proved disastrous, as the Egyptian leadership was unprepared to mitigate its devastating

effects. The initial Israeli assault was overwhelmingly destructive, catching Egypt off guard despite its claims of readiness.

The conflict commenced with the near-total destruction of Egypt's air force, which had been left exposed on runways without protection, seemingly awaiting annihilation. This unprecedented military failure set the stage for a rapid and catastrophic collapse. Egyptian troops were ordered to retreat from Sinai in disarray, without a coherent plan. The withdrawing forces became easy targets for Israeli air and ground attacks, turning the retreat into a massacre. Over 10,000 Egyptian soldiers were killed, and more than 5,000 were captured—many executed or buried in mass graves, while others were released after enduring humiliating conditions.

Egyptian media worsened the situation by spreading false reports of victories, claiming enemy losses in aircraft and tanks while portraying an imminent advance on Tel Aviv. This misinformation created a widespread illusion of success among the Arab populace. The stark reality only emerged on June 9, 1967, when President Gamal Abdel Nasser publicly admitted defeat in a somber address. He announced his resignation, stating, "I have made a decision, and I want your support for it," and accepted responsibility for the disaster. Nasser appointed Interior Minister Zakaria Mohieddin as his successor.

However, a mix of genuine and orchestrated protests erupted, urging Nasser to remain in power. Seizing the opportunity, he portrayed his return as a response to public demand, effectively consolidating his authority. Nasser then moved swiftly to eliminate political and military rivals, including his trusted ally, General Abdel Hakim Amer, the army commander. Amer's death, officially declared a suicide, remains shrouded in suspicion. Leveraging the situation, Nasser restructured Egypt's military leadership and introduced a new policy he called "removing the consequences of aggression," marking a calculated effort to regain stability and control in the war's aftermath.

Meanwhile, Israel had fully occupied Sinai and leveraged the Suez Canal as a formidable natural barrier. Taking strategic advantage of this waterway, Israel constructed a massive earthen rampart on the canal's eastern bank, adding another layer of defense. This fortification, reinforced by the robust Bar Lev Line—named after its architect—posed a significant military challenge due to its strategic design and resilience.

The Nakba of 1948, though devastating, had been somewhat anticipated. Its roots lay in British facilitation, foreign dominance over Arab nations, and the weak, poorly equipped Arab armies under foreign influence or control. In stark contrast, the 1967 Nakba was a sudden and overwhelming catastrophe. By then, Arab countries had gained independence, embraced Arab nationalism, and rallied behind Gamal Abdel Nasser as their leader. Nasser's regime frequently proclaimed its responsibility for liberating Palestine, promoting a narrative of military strength that highlighted advancements such as rockets and sophisticated weaponry.

However, even Nasser's most ardent detractors could not have predicted the scale and rapidity of the defeat. The Egyptian army, along with its arsenal, seemed to disintegrate, leaving Cairo alarmingly vulnerable—just two hours from an enemy that many had believed they were on the brink of defeating en route to Tel Aviv.

In Syria, the Golan Heights, a naturally fortified and elevated terrain, fell with surprising ease. This shocking loss, which might have been averted with basic military preparedness and vigilance, resulted in the deaths of 1,000 Syrian soldiers and underscored the disarray within Arab forces during the conflict.

In Jordan, the close relationship between King Hussein, the Israelis, and the Americans led the King to place significant trust in his allies, making it unthinkable for him to question their intentions. Secret meetings between King Hussein and Zionist leaders had already begun—an action considered deeply controversial and forbidden at the time. This clandestine

relationship was so significant that Israel reportedly warned King Hussein of its military plans either days or hours before launching its offensive.

Despite this, Israeli forces invaded the West Bank, then under Jordanian control, breaching any existing agreements or trust. Some observers suggest this invasion might have been prearranged between the two sides, though such claims remain speculative. Over 6,000 Jordanian soldiers lost their lives, and the Jordan River became the new boundary between Jordan and Israel. This defeat ended the ambitions of the late King Abdullah I, King Hussein's grandfather, to expand Jordan's borders.

As part of this invasion, Al-Aqsa Mosque—Islam's third holiest site—fell under Israeli occupation with minimal resistance. Shockingly, as noted in various accounts, not even a handful of young men or Jordanian soldiers reportedly died in its defense. The fall of Al-Aqsa represented a profound symbolic and strategic blow to the Arab and Islamic world, exacerbating the region's collective sense of loss and humiliation.

Israel swiftly demolished the Moroccan Quarter in Jerusalem, which was adjacent to Al-Aqsa Mosque, shortly after the war began on June 11, 1967. The residents were forcibly expelled, and the area was repurposed as a site for Jewish worship in front of the Western Wall (known by Jews as the "Wailing Wall"). On June 27, 1967, just twelve days later, Israel declared Jerusalem a unified city under Israeli sovereignty.

Following this, Israel quickly began establishing new Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, while also confiscating or demolishing Islamic historical and cultural landmarks. New synagogues were constructed close to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Most concerning, however, was the initiation of excavations beneath the mosque, a project that has continued and now threatens the stability of the mosque's structure. Cracks have begun to appear in the walls and foundations, and a serious attempt to set the mosque on fire occurred on August 21, 1969.

The Fall of Pan-Arabism and Nasserism

Throughout history, ideologies thrive when linked to triumphs and diminish when they are marked by defeat. The catastrophic military loss of 1967 marked a critical juncture, signaling the decline of Nasserism, Pan-Arabism, and Communism—ideologies that had shaped Egypt and much of the Arab world during Nasser's leadership. This ideological unraveling was so profound that some scholars reportedly expressed gratitude, viewing the defeat as an opportunity to reset prevailing thought patterns.[1]

During this era, overt atheism and moral degradation were rampant in state-controlled media, accompanied by a flood of unethical content in films and television. Such conditions led many to fear the erosion of Islamic identity in the region.

Just weeks before the 1967 defeat, Ibrahim Ikhlas boldly declared in the *Syrian Army* newspaper, "God, capitalism, imperialism, and all the values of the past society have become embalmed relics in the museums of history."[2] This sentiment mirrored the zeitgeist of a society deeply enamored with Nasser's persona and vision, where even carrying an Islamic book could brand someone as an outcast.[3]

p.166

Among the most significant outcomes of the second Nakba, particularly in relation to Palestine's history, are

the following:

1. The Collapse of Nasserism and Secular Arab Nationalism

The defeat of 1967 decisively undermined the political and ideological dominance of Gamal Abdel Nasser and the secular

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[1] Sheikh Mohammed Metwally Al-Shaarawy mentioned this about himself in a widely circulated video clip available on the internet.

[2] Abdullah Azzam, vol.1, p.839.

[3] Ahmad Mansur, pp.78-81 ff. The defeat not only shattered military hopes but also eroded the credibility of ideologies that had promised liberation and unity but delivered neither. [Translator]

Pan-Arab nationalist agenda. This ideology, which had once promised unity and strength, was revealed to be futile in the wake of the military failure, leading to widespread disillusionment across the Arab world.[1]

2. The Revival of Islamic Thought

In the aftermath of the defeat, Islamic ideologies began to regain traction, especially in Egypt and the Levant, offering a renewed framework for identity and resistance. This resurgence represented a significant shift from the secular ideologies that had characterized the preceding decades.[2]

3. Palestinian Disillusionment and Nationalism

Palestinians, having lost their homeland under the protection of ineffective Arab forces, experienced a profound sense of betrayal. This betrayal fueled a rejection of reliance on Arab regimes or secular nationalism, fostering a stronger sense of Palestinian national identity. As a result, many Palestinians turned toward nationalist factions and resistance movements that sought direct confrontation with the Israeli occupation.

4. Egyptian and Broader Arab Engagement with Palestinian Resistance

For the first time, the Egyptian government began to engage in limited cooperation with Palestinian resistance movements, shifting from its previous stance of rejection and suspicion. This marked the beginning of a cautious alignment that was mirrored, to varying extents, by other Arab governments. However, some regimes remained deeply skeptical or antagonistic toward Palestinian resistance groups.[3]

These developments reshaped both the regional political landscape and the Palestinian struggle, steering it in new ideological and strategic directions.

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[1] Salah Khalaf, p.94; Fathi al-Shiqaqi, vol.1, p.179.
[2] Abdullah Azzam, vol.1, pp.851-52.
[3] Salah Khalaf, pp.88, 96 ff.

Israel: The Leading Regional Power

Israel achieved several pivotal milestones in the 1967 war, marking a peak in its military and political ascent in the region. This war can be regarded as a turning point for Israel's strength for the following reasons:

1. Demonstrating Independent Power

While Israel's establishment in 1948 depended heavily on British patronage and robust colonial backing, the 1967 war proved its ability to sustain and expand its power independently. This victory showcased its capacity to act autonomously, without direct reliance on a global superpower.

2. Securing Its Legitimacy

From its founding, Israel's survival was widely questioned. Many doubted the feasibility of a small state enduring in a hostile Arab region. However, the 1967 victory dispelled these doubts, proving Israel's capability for growth, expansion, and long-term survival. This achievement positioned Israel as a viable partner for political, economic, and military agreements.

3. Cementing 1948 Gains

The war solidified the territorial and political gains Israel had achieved in 1948. Discussions of eliminating Israel vanished from international political discourse. Even decades later, negotiations have focused on returning to the borders of June 4, 1967, rather than questioning Israel's existence.

Following the 1967 war, Israel emerged as the region's preeminent power, unmatched by its neighbors. Its ability to simultaneously defeat the surrounding nations—Egypt, Jordan, and Syria—positioned it as the only reliable ally in the region for Western powers.

Before the war, major powers like the U.S. debated whether to bet on Israel or other client states in the region, such as Egypt, Türkiye, or Iran. These countries, with their larger populations,

resources, and geopolitical ambitions, were seen as potential regional leaders and more natural allies for foreign interests.

Despite being a foreign entity implanted in a hostile region, Israel's victory convinced global powers that it could outperform larger, resource-rich nations in the region. This altered the colonial calculus, making Israel the primary agent for safeguarding Western interests, effectively sidelining regional competitors like Egypt, Türkiye, and Iran.

By winning decisively in 1967, Israel not only expanded its territorial control but also reshaped its strategic relationship with colonial powers, carving out an unchallenged position as the region's dominant force.

The 1967 war displaced over 300,000 additional Palestinians. While this number is significant, it contrasts sharply with the scale of displacement during the Nakba of 1948. Several factors contributed to this difference:

1. Lessons from 1948

During the Nakba, Palestinians believed displacement was temporary, anticipating a swift return after the Arab armies succeeded. By 1967, they had learned from experience that Israeli forces aimed for long-term occupation and settlement, prompting many to stand their ground and stay in their homes despite the conflict.

2. Israeli Approach in 1967

Unlike 1948, Israel did not implement a systematic policy of mass displacement. Its territorial gains in 1967 were so rapid and expansive that they exceeded its immediate capacity to forcibly relocate populations.

3. Intelligence Windfall

The seizure of Egyptian and Jordanian intelligence archives provided Israel with a wealth of information on Palestinian resistance networks. This undermined the resistance by enabling the identification and neutralization of key figures.

4. Impact of Psychological and Ideological Vulnerabilities

The 1967 defeat deeply demoralized Palestinians and other Arab populations. With Islamist movements suppressed and Islamic consciousness diminished at the time, the populace was more susceptible to recruitment or coercion by Israeli authorities.

Over the years, through targeted military and security measures, as well as psychological pressure, Israel effectively weakened the resistance movements in the occupied territories, reducing them significantly by 1973.

For these pivotal Israeli gains, some even proposed erecting a grand statue of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Israel, arguing that without his policies and decisions, Israel might not have achieved such monumental success![1]

[1] Jalal Kishk, pp.23, 614.

The Path to Surrender and Normalization

A war of attrition erupted as intermittent skirmishes between Egyptian and Israeli forces along the Suez Canal. During this conflict, Israel carried out strikes deep into southern Egypt, while Egyptian units managed to carry out limited operations behind Israeli lines. Despite these actions, the engagements failed to alter the overall strategic balance. The conflict ended with Gamal Abdel Nasser accepting the U.S.-brokered Rogers Plan for a ceasefire. Shortly thereafter, Nasser passed away, and his vice president, Anwar Sadat, assumed the presidency, ushering Egypt into a prolonged phase described as "no war, no peace."

The October War

By the third year of his presidency, Sadat had consolidated power, sidelining Nasser's loyalists, and took decisive action. The Egyptian military launched a surprise offensive on the Sinai, crossing the Suez Canal and securing a foothold 10 to 15 kilometers deep on its eastern bank. To bolster these gains, Egypt deployed air defense systems to protect its positions.

Simultaneously, Syrian forces initiated an offensive on the Golan Heights, making initial advances. However, Israel swiftly regained the upper hand, repelling Syrian forces and recapturing lost positions. Israeli airstrikes penetrated deep into Syrian territory, targeting areas in Damascus. The Syrian front eventually deteriorated, leaving the region in a worse state than before, with heightened uncertainty about the potential extent of future Israeli advances.

On the Egyptian front, the campaign proceeded successfully for the first six days, with Egyptian forces maintaining their newly liberated positions as planned. The strategy was based on the

premise that Israel could not endure a protracted war due to its reliance on mass civilian mobilization, which paralyzed its economy. Additionally, the vast and desolate Sinai Peninsula lacked defensible terrain for Israeli forces, leading to the expectation that sustained pressure would eventually force an Israeli withdrawal.

However, complications arose after these early gains. President Anwar Sadat, overruling his military commanders, ordered an advance deeper into Sinai. This decision proved catastrophic, as it exposed Egyptian forces to devastating Israeli airstrikes, taking them beyond the protective range of their air defense systems. The result was the loss of over half of Egypt's 400 tanks in what came to be known as the Tank Massacre.

The ill-advised advance also created a critical breach in the Egyptian lines, which Israeli forces exploited. An Israeli division crossed to the western side of the Suez Canal, encircling the Egyptian Third Army. This maneuver posed a direct threat to Cairo, putting Egypt in a precarious position.

What began as a triumph devolved into a strategic debacle. At this point, the United States intervened diplomatically, negotiating a ceasefire to end the hostilities. The outcome on the Egyptian front was, at best, a stalemate, but many viewed it as a setback for Egypt. Israel successfully rebounded from the initial surprise attack and regained the upper hand.

The events that unfolded after the war sparked significant debate over Sadat's intentions and strategy:

Was his objective to wage a genuine war to reclaim Egyptian land, only to be overpowered by Israel's military capabilities and the unrelenting support of the United States, leading him to pivot toward peace? Or was the war intended from the outset as a limited operation, designed to break the political stalemate, establish his legitimacy, and ultimately pursue peace negotiations from a position of strength?

Evidence continues to build suggesting that Sadat's primary aim in the October War was to set the stage for peace with Israel. Key points supporting this interpretation include:

1. Statements from October War Commanders

Multiple commanders recall Sadat stating before the war, "I only need you to liberate 10 centimeters east of the canal; leave the rest to me."[1] This strongly indicates a premeditated plan to use the war as a steppingstone toward diplomatic negotiations. Non-military figures who met Sadat prior to the war have also confirmed similar sentiments.[2]

2. Premature Peace Proposals

While public expectations leaned toward continued military advances—ranging from the liberation of the Sinai to, optimistically, Jerusalem—Sadat surprised observers by proposing peace and expressing readiness to visit Israel before the battlefield dynamics shifted. This raised suspicions about his broader objectives.

3. Uncompromising Pursuit of Peace

Sadat's determination to finalize the peace treaty, even at the cost of political upheaval, led to high-profile resignations, including two foreign ministers. His resolute declaration, "The October War is the last war," weakened Egypt's negotiating position and highlighted his unwavering commitment to the treaty.

4. Leniency Toward Israeli Violations

Throughout and after the peace negotiations, Sadat displayed minimal opposition to significant Israeli actions, such as bombing Iraq and declaring Jerusalem its unified capital—moves that embarrassed Egypt politically. By contrast, he often treated other Arab nations with condescension and arrogance.

5. Alignment with Western Powers

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[1] Muhammad Fawzi, *Harb Oktobar: Dirāsah wa Durūs*, p.124.
[2] Salah Khalaf, pp, 195-6, 200.

Sadat's shift toward Western-aligned policies—politically, economically, and culturally—underscored his intent to firmly position Egypt within the U.S.- led sphere, signaling alignment with Israel's Western backers.

These factors have led many to conclude that the October War served as a calculated maneuver to bring Israel into the Arab world on seemingly honorable terms.[1] Some far-sighted observers recognized early on that the war's initial military successes would ultimately be eclipsed by political concessions, turning a partial victory into a comprehensive defeat.[2] While Israel officially withdrew from Sinai, it effectively entered Cairo through the gate of peace.

During the October War, the Egyptian public largely viewed the conflict as a part of the broader struggle to liberate Palestine, often perceiving the occupation of Palestine as more pressing than that of the Sinai.[3]

The contributions of Palestinian resistance fighters during the war are frequently understated. Though their guerrilla operations lacked the prominence of conventional military actions, they played a notable role. Both Anwar Sadat and Hafez al-Assad utilized the efforts of Palestinian fighters affiliated with the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA). Through coordination with the PLO leadership, these fighters carried out nearly 100 operations, targeting Israeli positions in the Golan Heights and the Upper Galilee.

Attempts to involve Jordan in a coordinated effort were unsuccessful. King Hussein steadfastly maintained a policy of keeping his borders quiet[4]— an unsurprising stance from a person like him!

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[1] Moshe Sasson, *7 Years in the Land of the Egyptians*, p.234 [Arabic ed.]; Lapidus, vol.2, p.859.

[2] Ahmed Mansour, p.97; Rifāī Tāha, *Wa al-Ān Atadhakkar*, p.80.

[3] Rifāī Tāha, p.70.

[4] Salah Khalaf, p.202.

The Sudden Shift Towards Peace

When examining the roots of peace initiatives with Israel, Sadat's efforts do not seem entirely unexpected. Earlier attempts, such as Husni al-Zaʿim's in Syria, aimed to negotiate peace and establish borders between Syria and Israel. However, David Ben-Gurion dismissed the proposal due to ambitions to secure control over all of Lake Tiberias' waters. Before that, Egypt under King Farouk also explored peace overtures.[1]

At the time, advocating for peace with Israel was tantamount to treason, yet such sentiments began permeating the atmosphere. Early warnings of this shift appeared as far back as 1953, when figures like Sayyid Qutb gave stark speeches in East Jerusalem. Qutb remarked, "We do not need Arab armies to liberate Palestine," while Mahmoud al-Sawwaf famously declared, "The hand that extends for peace with Israel shall be cut off."[2]

In this context, Sadat was not the first Arab leader to openly pursue peace with Israel. However, he became the first to "succeed" in formalizing such efforts. It is also important to recognize that clandestine ties between Israel and certain Arab leaders predated Sadat's initiative. These included covert relationships with King Abdullah of Jordan, his grandson King Hussein, Morocco's King Hassan II,[3] and his strongman, General Mohamed Oufkir,[4] among others.

When viewed in a broader historical context, Sadat's sudden shift toward "peace" with Israel stands out as an unexpected and dramatic departure. Previous attempts to negotiate peace with Israel had consistently failed, largely due to Israel's inflexible

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1 Moshe Sasson, p.32 ff.

2 Ibrahim Ghoshah, p.48.

3 Salah Khalaf recounts that Morocco's King Hassan II was the first to suggest to Yasser Arafat a secret meeting with Nahum Goldmann, the head of the World Jewish Congress. See *Filistini bi la Hawyiah*, p. 309.

4 The relationship between Oufkir and the Israelis reached a familial level. In her book *Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail*, Malika Oufkir recounts that Moshe Dayan's son was one of her friends and that her father was pleased with this friendship. See Malika Oufkir, pp. 88, 284, 289, 314 [Arabic ed.]

stance, further exacerbated by its aggressive territorial expansion during the 1967 war. At that time, Israel was widely vilified across the Arab world, perceived as a perpetual adversary to be confronted militarily. The modest gains of the October War reinforced the belief that reclaiming rights required the application of force.

Against this backdrop, Sadat's announcement advocating for peace and his expressed readiness to visit Israel came as a profound shock, unsettling both domestic and regional audiences. He rationalized his decision by asserting that Egypt could not sustain another confrontation with the United States, famously remarking that America controlled 99% of the cards in the region. Resolutely pursuing this path, Sadat disregarded widespread opposition, both internal and external, and went so far as to dismiss key military leaders who had played pivotal roles in the October War to solidify his trajectory toward peace.

A series of negotiations led to the Camp David Accords in 1978 and the Egypt-Israel peace treaty in 1979, significantly altering regional dynamics and profoundly impacting the Palestinian cause.

The agreement demilitarized Sinai, limiting Egypt's military presence to light weaponry and a modest force. Maps of troop deployment along the borders clearly indicate that Israel retains a far greater capacity to reoccupy Sinai than Egypt does to defend it. Effectively, Sinai functions as a buffer zone, enhancing Israel's strategic security.

Israelis gained unrestricted access to Sinai without requiring permits or authorization from Egyptian authorities—privileges not extended to ordinary Egyptians, who face limitations in accessing the region. The treaty also initiated diplomatic normalization, including the exchange of ambassadors and fostering economic, cultural, and security cooperation. These ties deepened under subsequent administrations, reaching significant levels during Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's presidency.

Following Sadat's assassination in 1981, Hosni Mubarak maintained the peace policy for 30 years, despite Israel's repeated treaty violations and aggressive actions in the region. Under Mubarak, peace with Israel became a central tenet of Egypt's foreign policy.

The most critical outcome was Egypt's withdrawal from the Palestinian struggle. By shifting from Arab nationalism to a narrower nationalist focus, Egypt relegated Palestine to a "local issue," leaving its responsibility solely to the Palestinians.

Arab-Israeli normalization can be categorized into three distinct types:

1. Public Normalization: Exemplified by Egypt's openly declared peace treaty with Israel.

2. Covert Relations: Secret interactions between certain Arab regimes and Israel.

3. Conditional Advocacy for Peace: Public calls for comprehensive peace dependent on Israel's withdrawal to the 1967 borders.

The trajectory of overt normalization, initiated by Sadat, unfolded cautiously and was profoundly shaped by his assassination on October 6, 1981, by Islamist members of the Egyptian military. This event sent shockwaves across the region, discouraging other leaders from pursuing peace agreements with Israel and effectively halting overt normalization for nearly four decades. Consequently, Egypt's normalization efforts remained largely confined to official and political spheres, rarely permeating public sentiment or grassroots engagement.

Military, security, and economic cooperation between Egypt and Israel developed incrementally,[1] with Jordan being a significant exception. Jordan formalized its peace treaty with Israel in 1994, 13 years after Sadat's death. However, even Jordan's normalization process was cautious, primarily limited to political and security

[1] For more detail, see Moshe Sasson, pp.114, 124, 159, 275-76.

domains. Publicly, Jordan maintained strong support for Palestinian rights and vocally opposed Israeli aggression, with its media often reflecting these positions.

A new wave of normalization emerged in the aftermath of the Arab Spring's decline, spearheaded by the UAE in the early 2020s. Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan soon followed. As of now, discussions are underway about overt normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel. Given Saudi Arabia's economic clout, geopolitical influence, and its role as custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, such a development could significantly reshape regional dynamics, potentially paving the way for more Arab and Islamic nations to establish formal ties with Israel.

The path of covert relations has remained a discreet but persistent aspect of Arab-Israeli diplomacy, with established and ongoing channels between Israel and countries like Jordan and Morocco.

Public initiatives advocating for a lasting peace based on Israeli withdrawal emerged soon after Egypt's normalization with Israel. In 1981, Saudi Crown Prince Fahd bin Abdulaziz proposed a peace initiative that, while contentious for implying recognition of Israel and acceptance of its post-1948 territorial gains, marked a significant shift in Arab diplomacy. The initiative was presented at the Arab summits in Fez, Morocco, in 1981 and 1982, receiving majority approval and becoming an official Arab proposal. Despite this, Israel dismissed the overture. Two decades later, Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz revived a similar initiative at the 2003 Arab League summit in Beirut, which again gained Arab backing, only to be ignored by Israel once more.

The Palestinian Cause After Egypt's Withdrawal

While Egypt is just one of 23 Arab states numerically, its geopolitical and demographic weight is unparalleled. Representing a quarter of the Arab world's population and possessing the strongest military among Arab nations, Egypt's withdrawal from

the collective struggle against Israel dealt a blow far greater than the loss of a single state. Its strategic location bordering both Palestine and Israel further underscores its critical importance, as Egypt's absence from the conflict undermined what amounted to the majority of Arab military and political leverage.

Even from a purely nationalistic or secular viewpoint, detached from religious or pan-Arab ideologies, Palestine remains a vital national security issue for Egypt, given its proximity and the regional implications of its instability.

Sadat's unilateral decision to forge peace with Israel sent shockwaves across the Arab world, particularly among Palestinians. Before Camp David Accords, such a move was inconceivable. The deputy leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) famously stated, "No Arab state would agree to a settlement without us, much less one against us."[1] However, reflecting later, he remarked, "The October War, for Palestinians and the Arab world, was merely a brief respite. Instead of advancing the liberation of occupied territories, it entrenched U.S. influence in the Middle East and facilitated efforts to dismantle Palestinian resistance."[2]

The peace treaty had profound regional repercussions, significantly strengthening Israel's position and enabling greater regional maneuverability. Key events following the treaty include:

- **May 1, 1980:** An attempt to blow up Al-Aqsa Mosque, highlighting increased tensions over Jerusalem.
- **July 30, 1980:** Israel declared Jerusalem its "eternal, undivided capital," embedding this status into its constitutional framework.

[1] Salah Khalaf, p.13.
[2] Ibid., pp.211, 326.

- **June 1981:** Israel conducted an airstrike on Iraq's nuclear reactor, days after a meeting between Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin in Sharm El Sheikh.

- **1982 Lebanon Invasion:** Israel invaded Lebanon, reaching Beirut and carrying out, directly or via allies, several massacres. The Sabra and Shatila massacre (September 16–18, 1982) resulted in the deaths of 1,000 to 3,000 Palestinian refugees.

Saudi minister Ghazi Al-Gosaibi reflected on these developments, writing in his memoirs, "The Lebanon crisis proved that without Egypt, the Arab world cannot engage militarily with Israel. Neutralizing Egypt in the Arab-Israeli conflict acted as a green light, allowing Israel to dominate the region unchecked."[1]

Even more concerning is that the Egyptian government failed to take substantive action to deter such atrocities. The Israeli ambassador to Egypt was reportedly surprised that, following the Sabra and Shatila massacre, Egypt's sole response was to withdraw its ambassador from Israel. Moreover, Egyptian officials reassured the United States that this withdrawal was the extent of their intended escalation—falling short of even Israel's minimal expectations from Egypt.

The issue of Gaza, which had been seized from Egypt by Israel, also reflected this stance. The Egyptian regime no longer considered itself responsible for Gaza's liberation, despite its direct role in the territory's loss. Instead, it relegated Gaza to being exclusively a Palestinian matter.

This effectively left Palestine politically orphaned, severed from its broader Arab and Islamic identity, a process that began with the British occupation. Mustafa Kemal's abolition of the caliphate further dismantled the Islamic framework of responsibility for Palestine, scattering the duty for its liberation among fragmented Arab states, none of which fully assumed the

[1] Ghazi al-Gosaibi, *al-Wazīr al-Murāfiq*, p.202.

role. Arab nationalist regimes later replaced action with rhetoric, offering empty slogans before ultimately surrendering the remainder of Palestine to Zionist control. Subsequently, the era of peace accords and normalization treaties further entrenched this abandonment, leaving Palestine under occupation with no concrete effort for liberation.

For those examining historical records only at the surface-level, these events present a tragic trajectory. Yet a deeper dive into eyewitness accounts and declassified documents reveals a more damning reality. Palestine's downfall was not merely the result of neglect or passive betrayal. It was exacerbated by active collaboration, where some Arab leaders conspired with Zionists—not only against Palestine but, at times, against their own nations—all in pursuit of securing or maintaining political power and authority.

The Israelis intensified the construction of settlements and expanded the Jewish presence in Gaza and the West Bank, triggering a relentless wave of land, water, and resource appropriation. This left Palestinians with little choice but to seek employment under Israeli control, exacerbating their dependence on the occupier. Additionally, Israel implemented multi-tiered programs designed to normalize its presence, alter the social fabric, and infiltrate Palestinian cultural and intellectual domains.

In response to these escalating pressures, Palestinians recognized that reclaiming their homeland required self-reliance. This struggle, however, was daunting—an almost impossible battle given the stark imbalance of power. The Israeli military's dominance, bolstered by extensive international support, and the widespread Arab betrayal—manifested in indifference and abandonment—compounded the challenges. Despite these obstacles, Palestinians never abandoned their resistance. Instead, they launched their strongest wave of defiance during the era of

peace treaties and normalization, signaling their unwavering commitment to their cause.

The Era of Resistance

Throughout history, dominant conquerors have often obliterated or absorbed the cultures of the peoples they subdued. Examples include the eradication or assimilation of Indigenous populations in Australia and the Americas and the forced conversion or extermination of Muslims in Andalusia and parts of Eastern Europe. When oppressors possess overwhelming power and pursue a policy of extermination and colonization—not merely exploitation or subjugation—they often succeed in crushing resistance and reshaping the destiny of the conquered.

Palestine could have suffered a similar fate if not for the presence of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque—sacred landmarks central to the Islamic faith, referenced in the Qur'an, and deeply cherished by Muslims worldwide. These holy sites have provided Palestinian resistance with a profound spiritual anchor, serving as an unyielding source of resolve. This connection to faith fortified the resistance during circumstances that might have otherwise led to complete subjugation or cultural erasure.

Initially, Palestinian resistance encompassed both Islamic and non-Islamic factions, with the latter dominating for a period. Yet, the spiritual and religious depth of Jerusalem cause gradually steered the leadership of the resistance toward Islamic movements. Over time, non-Islamic factions weakened, declined, or, in some cases, collaborated with the occupation. Despite fluctuating political tides, the Islamic foundation of resistance has remained steadfast, upholding the enduring spirit of Palestinian defiance. It continues to be the cornerstone of their struggle against occupation and oppression, even when other movements faltered or deviated from the cause.

Non-Islamic Resistance Movements

Palestinian resistance after the Nakba persisted sporadically, sustained by volunteer efforts until it largely ceased following the 1956 war. Notable contributors included members of the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Kamal Al-Sharif, alongside volunteers from Gaza and the Sinai.

The establishment of Fatah in Kuwait in 1957, spearheaded by Yasser Arafat, marked a significant turning point. Although the movement began with an Islamic orientation, drawing heavily on the Muslim Brotherhood's youth, it gradually expanded to include diverse ideological factions, ultimately adopting a secular stance. Fatah launched its first military operations at the end of 1964, signifying its active engagement in the resistance.

To understand the rise of an independent Palestinian resistance movement, separate from Arab regimes, it is crucial to examine the factors that motivated its formation:

1. **Disillusionment with Arab Regimes**: Growing frustration with the inaction of Arab governments, particularly Egypt—which faced an Israeli attack in 1956 but failed to take concrete steps toward liberating Palestine—led to a desire for self-reliant action.

2. **Inspiration from the Algerian Revolution**: Algeria's successful fight for independence from France provided Palestinians with a powerful example of what a determined, self-reliant nation could achieve. It demonstrated that liberation was possible without Arab armies or the long-promised but unrealized unity, proving that independence could precede unification.[1]

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[1] On the impact of the Algerian Revolution on the youth of the Palestinian movement at the time, see Salah Khalaf, p.67; Ahmad Jibril, *Dhākirat al-Thawrah al-Filistīniyah al-Muāsirah*, pp.36, 40, 53, 57. We will return to discuss the parallels between Algeria's situation and Palestine's in the conclusions presented at the end of this study, God willing.

3. **Belief in Armed Struggle**: A realization emerged that armed resistance was the only viable path to unify Palestinians around their cause and force international attention to their plight.

4. **Frustration with Inaction**: Palestinians recognized the urgent need to move beyond the unfulfilled rhetoric of Arab regimes and political parties, which had failed to translate slogans and speeches into meaningful action.[1]

This context laid the groundwork for the emergence of a distinct Palestinian resistance movement, characterized by its ideological diversity and commitment to reclaiming Palestine, setting the stage for its evolution and continued struggle.

The narrative resumes with Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Fatah movement and a key figure among Palestinian students residing in Egypt. Arafat was associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and led the Palestinian Students' Union, which was predominantly under the influence of Islamists or their allies until 1957. This period of Islamist leadership ended abruptly following the severe crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood under Nasser's regime.

Khalil al-Wazir, later known as Abu Jihad, became the second-in-command of Fatah for three decades. A member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza, he actively participated in resistance operations led by Kamal Al-Sharif. However, al-Wazir faced repeated arrests and eventual exile by the Nasser regime, which curtailed his ability to operate within Gaza. This forced him to relocate—first to Cairo, then to Saudi Arabia, and ultimately to Kuwait, where he joined the efforts to establish Fatah.

An examination of Fatah's founding members reveals that many were linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. Notable figures include Saeed Al-Muzayen, Ghalib Al-Wazir, Salim Al-Zaʿnoun, Salah Khalaf, Asʿad Al-Saftawi, Muhammad Youssef Al-Najjar,

[1] Salah Khalaf, p53, 67 ff; Ibrahim Ghosheh, p.107.

Kamal Adwan, and Rafiq Al-Natsheh. Initially, Fatah maintained its Islamist ties, incorporating Brotherhood members until 1963. It then broadened its scope, welcoming individuals from diverse ideological and political backgrounds, reflecting its transition into a secular nationalist movement.[1]

If Yasser Arafat was close to the Muslim Brotherhood, the second-in-command of Fatah was from their ranks, and many of its founders and members were Islamists, why didn't Fatah evolve into an Islamist movement aligned with the Brotherhood? Moreover, how did it become a secular nationalist organization, and why were Islamists absent from the resistance's forefront until their reemergence during the First Intifada in the late 1980s?

The answer lies in the devastating blows dealt to Islamist movements, particularly in their two major strongholds: Egypt and the Levant. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood suffered a crippling crackdown under Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1954, followed by another, harsher campaign in 1965–66, culminating in the execution of the prominent leader Sayyid Qutb in 1966.[2] Similarly, in Syria, the Brotherhood faced relentless persecution, with laws enacted that made membership punishable by death. Waves of suppression in Syria continued for nearly two decades, peaking in the mid-1980s.[3] Additionally, after Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza, many key Islamist figures were exiled to prevent them from becoming resistance leaders.[4]

On the other hand, Jordan adopted a different approach of containment rather than repression. This stemmed from the fragile internal stability of the Jordanian regime and its fear of being overshadowed by the rising tide of pan-Arab nationalism in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. Jordan thus became a refuge for Islamists fleeing

[1] Ahmad Mansur, pp.75-76; Ibrahim Gosheh, p.68; Muhsin Saleh, p.78.
[2] Ahmad Mansur, pp.66, 77.
[3] Abdullah Azzam, vol.1, p.850.
[4] Ahmad Mansur, pp.71-72.

persecution. However, their precarious situation left them with little opportunity to rebel or organize a formal resistance movement. Internal fragmentation and the scattering of their leadership further hindered their ability to engage in structured resistance during this turbulent period.

Amid the prevailing weakness caused by overwhelming challenges, Islamist movements sought a path that aligned with the nature of their predicament and their disheartened state. They adopted the belief that liberating Palestine could not be achieved solely through the efforts of its people, as they were considered too weak to confront the Zionists and their allies. Instead, they posited that liberation would come through the establishment of an Islamic state capable of shouldering this monumental task.

This belief effectively redirected efforts away from active resistance against Zionists toward a focus on educational, scholarly, and media-oriented activities aimed at building the foundation for an Islamic state. As a result, the Islamist movement withdrew from the ongoing resistance. It also adopted firm stances against members who chose to engage in active resistance, expelling them and distancing themselves from other groups committed to the fight. The scale of the defeat weighed heavily on Islamists, fostering a tendency to retreat and focus on survival rather than direct engagement.

This approach faced internal resistance. Many members of Islamist movements defected to join leftist, nationalist, and other factions. Some factions within the movement attempted to correct its course, stage revolts, or form splinter groups, but these efforts failed in the end. These failures, however, paved the way for the emergence of the Islamic Resistance Movement, or Hamas, in the early 1980s.[1]

[1] Refer to the memoirs of Ibrahim Ghosheh, *The Red Minaret*, and the memoirs of Adnan Masoudi, *To Confrontation*. Both leaders attempted to correct the course

It is worth emphasizing that the idea adopted by Islamists, the notion of establishing a state to lead the liberation of Palestine, was not unique to them. Many political movements that formed in the aftermath of the Nakba, particularly Arab nationalist parties, embraced a similar premise. These groups argued that the liberation of Palestine was beyond the capacity of Palestinians alone, framing it instead as a pan-Arab cause. Their vision prioritized unifying the Arab world as a precursor to engaging in the struggle for Palestine's liberation,[1] a perspective that resonated with many Palestinians at the time.[2]

Despite this shared premise, Islamists and nationalists diverged in their trajectories. Islamists faced an era of harsh repression, particularly in Egypt and Syria, where their movements were systematically dismantled. Meanwhile, Arab nationalists thrived during the peak of Arab nationalism, enjoying significant influence in these same countries. While the Islamists' retreat can be attributed to their weakened state and relentless persecution, the nationalists bear greater scrutiny for their failure to achieve substantive progress, often limiting their contributions to rhetorical support.

Ultimately, the responsibility for initiating the liberation struggle fell neither to the Islamists nor to the nationalists but to the "patriots," who maintained that Palestinians themselves were capable of—or at the very least could take the lead in starting—the battle for liberation. This approach marked a departure from a reliance on broader ideological frameworks, focusing instead on the agency and determination of the Palestinian people.

Thus, it can be said that those who carried the burden of the struggle were neither the Islamists nor the nationalists but rather

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of the Islamist movement, urging it to join the resistance effort, though they were unsuccessful. Later, both became key leaders and founders of Hamas.

[1] Munir Shafiq, *Min Jamr ilā Jamr*, p.84 ff.

[2] Salah Khalaf, pp.47, 66, 100; Ahmad Jibril, pp.53, 87.

the "patriots," who believed Palestinians were capable—if not fully, then at least in taking the first steps—of initiating the liberation effort independently. From this point, Palestinian national identity began to emerge, solidify, and deepen, a development that brought both benefits and challenges.

Fatah played a pivotal role in this transformation, seeking to free the Palestinian cause from the grip of Arab regimes. It pursued a strategy of acting independently, as much as possible, within a difficult political environment. Fatah also attempted to strike a careful balance between retaining autonomy in its decision-making and navigating the influence of more powerful Arab states, each vying for control of the Palestinian issue. Meanwhile, Arab and regional politics leveraged the situation for their own purposes. Sometimes they co-opted the Palestinian cause under the guise of Arab unity, while at other times, they deflected responsibility, arguing that Palestinians themselves were the rightful and independent custodians of their struggle.

Organized Palestinian resistance began in earnest when Fatah established its military wing, *Al-Asifah* (The Storm), launching operations in December 1964. In less than two years, leading up to 1967, it carried out nearly 200 operations. Over time, Fatah's secular and nationalist character became so pronounced that its initial Islamic influences seemed almost entirely erased.

Fatah was not alone in this formative period. The Arab Nationalist Movement, which originated among students at the American University of Beirut, initially adopted a nationalist stance aligned with Nasserism. George Habash was one of its prominent figures. This movement later transitioned to Marxist ideology and, by 1967, united with other smaller groups to form the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

This situation provoked both concern and suspicion from Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had previously dismantled the All-Palestine Government and placed its leader, Amin al-Husseini, and

his administration under heavy restrictions until it withered away. Observing these developments, Nasser sought to reestablish a Palestinian political entity, leveraging a dormant 1959 Arab League resolution. Consequently, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established in 1964, with Ahmad Shukeiri at its helm, backed by Nasser. A Palestinian National Council convened in Jerusalem on May 28, 1964, gathering over 400 representatives of the Palestinian people. The council elected Shuqeiri as the PLO's leader, reaffirmed its commitment to liberating all of Palestine, and resolved to establish the Palestinian Liberation Army.

While Palestinians celebrated this development with widespread enthusiasm, emerging resistance movements harbored skepticism. Groups like Fatah and leftist factions, already pursuing paths of resistance, hesitated to join the PLO, viewing it as yet another attempt by Arab states to control the Palestinian cause without genuine efforts toward liberation.[1] At the same time, Fatah had not yet risen to prominence as a leading resistance movement and thus did not command significant attention from the Nasserist regime or other Arab political actors.

The catastrophic defeat of the 1967 war, often referred to as the second Nakba, had mixed repercussions. On the one hand, it enabled Palestinian resistance to establish operational bases in neighboring frontline states where state authority was weak (i.e., Lebanon and Jordan).[2] On the other hand, resistance activities were suppressed in states with strong regimes, like Egypt and Syria.[3] Many influential Arab countries viewed Fatah's military

[1] Salah Khalaf, p.78 ff; Ahmad Jibril, pp.83, 91-92.
[2] Salah Khalaf, p96.
[3] This observation is crucial: strong regimes in the contemporary era have rarely directed their power toward the benefit of their nations or peoples. Instead, their increasing strength often correlates with heightened oppression of their populations and greater acquiescence to external adversaries. Conversely, weaker regimes tend to favor the interests of the nation, inadvertently posing challenges to the enemy's objectives.

wing, Al-Asifah, with suspicion and hostility, and were reluctant to endorse its resistance efforts.[1]

The three years from 1967 to 1970 marked a golden age for Palestinian resistance,[2] particularly in Jordan. After the shock of losing the West Bank during the 1967 war, King Hussein of Jordan was forced to release Palestinian activists and fighters, allowing them to set up bases of operation along the Jordan River.[3]

This era reached its zenith with the Battle of Karameh on March 21, 1968. In this pivotal encounter, Palestinian resistance forces, alongside the Jordanian military, successfully repelled an Israeli incursion. The battle resulted in over 30 Israeli deaths and more than 100 injuries, forcing the invaders to retreat. This marked a significant morale boost for Arabs, dispelling the myth of Israeli invincibility that had taken hold following the 1967 war.[4]

The victory at Karameh sparked widespread enthusiasm, drawing tens of thousands of volunteers to join Fatah, which emerged as the dominant force in the Palestinian struggle. During this period, young Islamic activists intensified pressure on their leaders to join the resistance effort. This led to the creation of "Sheikhs' Camps" in Jordan, which brought together Islamic youth and religious figures. However, these camps ultimately operated under the leadership of the secular Fatah movement.[5]

Resistance activity surged during these years, with operations escalating from 12 per month in 1967 to 52 per month in 1968, 199 per month in 1969, and reaching 279 per month in the early months of 1970. This period of fervent resistance solidified the foundation for future Palestinian liberation efforts.[6]

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[1] Salah Khalaf, p.97.
[2] Ahmad Jibril, p.214; Muhsin Saleh, p.89.
[3] Salah Khalaf, p.102.
[4] For more about the battle of Karameh, see Salah Khalaf, p102 ff.
[5] Ibrahim Gosheh, p.108.
[6] Salah Khalaf, p.106.

The aftermath of the Nakba and the Battle of Karameh elevated Fatah's status, reshaping its role in Palestinian and Arab politics. During this period, Fatah joined the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and rapidly became its dominant faction, achieving full control by the summer of 1968. In February 1969, Yasser Arafat assumed the chairmanship of the PLO.[1] This marked a significant milestone for Palestinians, as the leader of the PLO emerged not through external endorsement from an Arab leader but through the credibility earned by resistance activities on the ground.

However, Arafat's leadership came with complex challenges. The PLO encompassed various Palestinian factions, each maintaining affiliations with different regional powers. These factions often pursued their own agendas, making it difficult for Arafat to enforce a unified strategy. At the same time, he could neither disassociate from nor expel dissenting factions outright, even when they defied the PLO's general policies.

The combination of these gains and responsibilities propelled Fatah into yet another crisis. The movement, which had risen sharply and capitalized on the Jordanian regime's weakness, grew overconfident. Many members became dangerously arrogant, convinced they were a powerful force on the ground and even considered overthrowing the king, abolishing the monarchy, and establishing a republic.[2] They spread the slogan "All power to the resistance" and took actions such as hijacking planes and landing them at Amman airport, renaming it "Revolutionary Airport." These actions significantly undermined the king's sovereignty and authority.[3]

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[1] Salah Khalaf, p.112 ff.

[2] Abdullah Azzam, vol.1, p.840; Ahmed Mansour, pp.86-87 ff; Ahmad Jibril, pp.205-06.

[3] Hussien ben Talal, *My Job is a King*, p.212 ff, 234, 239, 240; Ahmad Jibril, pp.21, 238.

Additionally, the secular, leftist ideologies within Fatah led some members to openly mock religion and God. This atheistic, revolutionary mindset[1] caused numerous conflicts with Jordanian soldiers, local elites, and religious leaders, both in Jordan and among Palestinians themselves. Moreover, the deep divisions within Palestinian factions created opportunities for internal sabotage, manipulation, and the emergence of new factions with competing agendas.

On the other hand, despite suffering a significant blow in 1967, the Jordanian regime neither broke free from American influence nor transitioned into a revolutionary resistance state. From its inception, it was fundamentally reliant on foreign powers—first British and later American. Thus, engaging in direct war with Israel was never a serious consideration. Moreover, motivated by the instinct to preserve its monarchy, the regime could not tolerate the growing military autonomy that increasingly challenged its authority, exposed its vulnerabilities, and diminished its sovereignty.

The regime's position was further bolstered by strong American and British support,[2] which was unlikely to waver in favor of movements that targeted Israel. As a creation of British intelligence and a continuation of King Abdullah I's legacy, the Jordanian system relied on evasive maneuvers, manipulative strategies, and the heavy use of intelligence tactics. This approach included recruiting informants or enabling impulsive, opportunistic individuals to escalate provocations, fostering distrust, and destabilize relationships, creating the conditions necessary for decisive crackdowns.

An external factor further amplifies these internal tensions. Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's acceptance of U.S. Secretary of State William Rogers' ceasefire initiative, which paused the Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition, introduced a new dynamic.

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[1] Abdullah Azzam, vol.1, pp.849, 852 and vol.4, p.51; Ahmad Jibril, p.219.
[2] Hussien ben Talal, p.207.

This agreement, rejected by Fatah and other Palestinian factions, aligned Nasser's and King Hussein's objectives in curbing the disruptive Palestinian resistance. Their reconciliation, following a period of strained relations, was symbolized by the King's ceremonial reception in Alexandria. It strongly suggested that their discussions likely included coordinated plans to address the challenges posed by Palestinian factions.[1]

For all these reasons, events quickly escalated into what became known as "Black September" in 1970, marked by intense clashes between the Jordanian army and Fatah. These battles devastated cities and homes, resulting in widespread destruction and trauma. The terror inflicted on civilians was so severe that many children suffered long-lasting psychological and mental health effects.[2] King Hussein, reportedly "willing to save his throne at any cost, even if it meant burying his capital under bombardment,"[3] used overwhelming force. The campaign reached its peak with the crushing of resistance fighters in the forests of Jerash by Jordanian tanks.[4] After many bitter confrontations, the conflict concluded with the expulsion of Fatah and its fighters from Jordan—or, more precisely, what remained of them after hundreds were killed and thousands imprisoned. Thus, ended what was described as "the era of the Palestinian movement's pride."[5]

This defeat cost the Palestinian resistance its most critical base of operations. Jordan offered the longest contiguous front for engagement with Israel, significant popular support due to its large Palestinian population, and a relatively weak governing system. Compounding these losses was the regime's vulnerability, having recently suffered the loss of the West Bank, and its young king,

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[1] Salah Khalaf, p.133 ff, p.150, compare the narrative of King Hussien's in *My Job is King*, pp.234-35, 238.
[2] Abdullah Azzam, vol.1, p.840.
[3] Salah Khalaf, p.7.
[4] Abdullah Azzam, vol.1, p.840.
[5] Salah Khalaf, p.127.

only 35 years old, still navigating the complexities of ruling a precarious monarchy.[1]

Was the Palestinian resistance defeated solely due to its military inferiority, lacking the strength to stand against the Jordanian army? Or was its defeat rooted in deeper issues, such as internal fragmentation, disarray, and security breaches—including betrayals and individual agreements with the Jordanian regime or others? Without these factors, could they have emerged victorious? The narratives surrounding these events offer widely differing perspectives.

Another significant question arises regarding the role of Arab regimes that ostensibly supported the resistance while opposing King Hussein. These regimes, whose backing was central to the resistance's strategic calculations, unexpectedly adopted passive or even complicit positions. Leaders such as Nasser and Qaddafi remained silent or engaged in subtle provocations before the outbreak of conflict, while the Syrian army abstained from intervening altogether. Was this a mere coincidence? Or was it a deliberate act of collusion with King Hussein, the adversary they had long vilified, to weaken the resistance they publicly supported? Here again, there are various interpretations, each supported by a wealth of details and conflicting accounts.

The conclusion was painfully clear: even at its zenith, the Palestinian resistance lacked the strength to face the military of an unstable regime. In their most desperate hour, the resistance's principal allies stood idle, failing to provide the support so critically needed. This reality deeply influenced the strategies and perspectives of both current and future generations of resistance

[1] One balanced account of these events, despite being written by a founding member of Fatah, is the narrative by Abu Iyad (Salah Khalaf) in his memoir *Palestinian Without an Identity*, starting from page 127 onwards. King Hussein also provides his perspective in his memoir *My Job is King*, beginning on page 233 and beyond. Additionally, Ahmad Jibril offers his version of the events in his memoir *Memory of the Revolution*, starting from page 219.

leaders. Yet, lessons learned in the aftermath of defeat are rarely impartial. They are often tainted by the anguish of failure and the diminishing of morale.

The events of Black September had profound and far-reaching consequences, the most significant of which was the onset of weakness within the Palestinian resistance movement. For the first time, the movement confronted its inability to overcome a weak Arab regime, let alone challenge the heavily armed Zionist state, bolstered by Western support and equipped with advanced weaponry. This defeat marked a turning point, as resistance ideology began to reflect elements of vulnerability and an openness to alternative methods of struggle. Even those who had yet to engage in the struggle drew sobering lessons from these events, restricting their reliance to Palestinians within the occupied territories and avoiding confrontation with Arab regimes, regardless of their actions or overt betrayals.

Despite this grim beginning, the 1970s witnessed some of the most notable political achievements for the Palestinian resistance. In October 1974, during the Arab Summit held in Morocco, Arab states officially recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Although this decision had technically been made the year prior, it was kept under wraps due to objections from King Hussein, who harbored aspirations of regaining the West Bank with American backing. Instead, U.S. policy leveraged his ambitions as a tool to counter Palestinian resistance efforts.[1]

This recognition is often framed as an act of Arab solidarity with the PLO. However, Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad), a prominent leader within Fatah, the PLO, and its intelligence apparatus, revealed a more complex narrative. According to Abu Iyad, Arab leaders were pressured into the decision under the threat of assassination. He recounted that plans were made to eliminate

[1] Salah Khalaf, pp.226-27.

King Hussein in Morocco, among other figures, although not all potential targets were identified, leaving an atmosphere of pervasive danger. This looming threat ultimately forced the leaders to approve and announce the decision, reshaping the trajectory of Palestinian resistance.[1]

This decision represented a significant achievement for the Palestinians in asserting their independence, particularly from King Hussein. Much like his grandfather Abdullah, Hussein had long cast a shadow over Palestine, seeking to dominate and monopolize representation of its cause. He, too, placed his trust entirely in the British and Americans, and was neither feared nor his betrayals trusted.[2]

At the same time, the decision allowed Arab states to sidestep their responsibilities toward the Palestinian cause by placing it in the hands of a group of Palestinians who had minimal power and resources. These Palestinians were left dependent on the sporadic, and often withheld, aid from Arab kings and presidents.

The following month, in November 1974, Yasser Arafat was invited to address the United Nations General Assembly in New York. This marked a pivotal moment for the Palestinian cause on the international stage, elevating it from a humanitarian issue centered on refugees to the case of a people under occupation, presented before the global community.

This milestone was not solely a result of Palestinian efforts or Arab support. It was, in large part, a byproduct of the global political landscape of the time, defined by the Cold War rivalry between the Soviet Union-led Eastern bloc, and the US-led Western bloc. This bipolar competition created openings for smaller, weaker actors to assert themselves and influence global issues. During this period, several international resolutions in favor

[1] Ibid., p.227 ff.
[2] Salah Khalaf, pp.216, 226; Rashid al-Khalidi, pp.88-89.

of the Palestinians were adopted. Notable among these were the 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racial discrimination and the endorsement of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the recovery of their rights by all necessary means.

However, these resolutions had limited practical impact. The United States' unwavering support for Israel, coupled with the diminishing will of Arab states to genuinely support the Palestinian cause, rendered these gains largely symbolic.

On the military and operational front, the Palestinians, despite losing the irreplaceable Jordanian front, successfully shifted their activities to Lebanon. While Lebanon offered only a narrow border access—79 kilometers compared to Jordan's 360 kilometers—it was the only remaining option. Crucially, it was not controlled by a strong central government, allowing for greater operational flexibility.

The circumstances in Lebanon bore similarities to those in Jordan, yet significant differences set them apart. Both countries hosted large Palestinian refugee populations, which continued to grow over time. These refugees lived in camps that evolved into densely populated areas marked by severe poverty and marginalization. They suffered a profound sense of alienation, perpetuated by laws and regulations relegating them to second- or third-class status. As in Jordan, Palestinian resistance movements recruited fighters from among the refugees, equipping them with arms for guerrilla operations. Additionally, the post-1967 Nakba era saw regional governments relax their grip on the resistance, enabling a revival of Palestinian activities. This resurgence gained further momentum after the morale-boosting Battle of Karameh in 1968, which fueled optimism among the fighters. However, this newfound confidence often manifested as overzealous displays of power, leading to frequent and unnecessary confrontations with state forces.

In contrast, Lebanon's internal dynamics differed sharply from Jordan's relatively unified state apparatus. Lebanon was deeply fractured along sectarian and political lines—divisions between Sunnis and Shias, Muslims and Christians, and Arab nationalists and Western-leaning factions. These rifts eroded the Lebanese government's cohesion and decision-making capacity. While this weakened the state, it simultaneously created opportunities for groups willing to exploit these fractures to ignite and escalate conflicts.

The first significant clashes between Palestinian fighters and the Lebanese army occurred in late 1969. Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser intervened as a mediator, brokering the Cairo Agreement of 1969. This agreement granted Palestinian resistance movements the freedom to operate in southern Lebanon. Leveraging this newfound operational base, the resistance launched several audacious operations, including the infamous Savoy Hotel operation on March 6, 1975. In this mission, Palestinian fighters infiltrated Tel Aviv by sea, seized control of the Savoy Hotel, and took hostages, demanding the release of Palestinian prisoners in exchange. The ensuing battle was intensely lopsided, as eight resistance fighters faced off against Israeli special forces. The confrontation ended with the fighters depleting their ammunition, resulting in the martyrdom of seven of them, while inflicting significant casualties—nearly 100 Israelis were killed.

Compared to Fatah's operations, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), alongside the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and other smaller or independent factions, gained prominence for their distinctive tactics. These included hijacking airplanes to exchange hostages for Palestinian prisoners; targeting sensitive sites such as the 1972 Lod Airport attack; taking hostages abroad, such as the Munich operation in 1972; storming settlements to seize hostages for prisoner exchanges, such as the Kiryat Shmona (Khalasa)

operation in 1974; and even attacking Israeli military schools, as seen in the Ma'alot (Tershiha) operation in 1974.

In retaliation, Israel carried out airstrikes on Palestinian bases, bombings, and infrastructure destruction in Lebanon, alongside high-profile assassinations of Palestinian leaders. These targeted both civilian political figures and military commanders, including Ghassan Kanafani and Wael Zuaiter in 1972, as well as Mahmoud Al-Hamshari, Hussein Abu Al-Khair, Mohammed Yousef Al-Najjar, Kamal Adwan, and Kamal Nasser in 1973.

The launch of guerrilla operations from Lebanon, coupled with Israel's ability to execute major assassinations on Lebanese soil, exacerbated tensions. Members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which included Fatah and other factions, interpreted these events as potential collusion or even involvement by the Lebanese army. This perception fueled anger and demands for the army to fulfill its responsibilities. Meanwhile, the Lebanese government and army regarded the refugee camps, organizations, and fighters as dangerous power centers beyond their control. These entities not only caused external conflicts but also caused internal instability, leading to calls for stronger regulation of the camps.

The Palestinians, experiencing a newfound sense of power and its intoxicating appeal after years of humiliation—though not yet entirely free from it—resisted any attempts at control. Among Lebanon's factions, the Maronite Christians stood out for their hostility toward and eagerness to confront the Palestinians. This animosity facilitated a growing alliance between the Maronites and the Israelis, who supplied them with a steady flow of weapons, expertise, and training.[1] These factors on the ground culminated in repeated provocations and escalating clashes.

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[1] Anyone who has studied the history of the Levant will instinctively recognize the scale of betrayals and treachery carried out by the Christians of the region during the times of the Crusades and Mongol invasions, and later during the

A third factor emerged amidst the turmoil: the fragmentation of Palestinian factions, whether operating under the umbrella of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) or independently. Some of these factions became mercenaries, serving the interests of their financiers. This dynamic enabled regimes such as those in Iraq or Syria, among others, to direct their affiliated factions—or bribe particular groups or individuals—to carry out assassinations or bombings targeting Lebanese figures or organizations. These actions further fueled the flames of discord, deepening animosity toward Palestinians and the broader resistance movement.

This volatile situation ultimately culminated in the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. The initial spark was a massacre carried out by Maronite Christian forces, who ambushed a bus carrying Palestinians, indiscriminately opening fire and killing everyone aboard, including women and children.

Palestinians in Lebanon, whether displaced refugees in camps or militant fighters, became a central and contentious issue in the conflict, caught in the crossfire of competing factions. Palestinian fighters were drawn into the war as active participants in its shifting alliances, while also bearing the brunt of its devastation.

The civil war opened the door to rampant espionage, arms smuggling, and devastating bombings across various regions. Christian militias intensified their assault on Palestinian camps, laying sieges and perpetrating widespread massacres. In response, the PLO engaged directly in the war, striving to defend its position,

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periods of British and French colonialism. However, the rise of contemporary secular ideologies, the defeatist attitude of many Muslims toward them, and the dominance of these ideologies over cultural, media, and educational institutions have led to a rewriting of modern history that often conceals and glosses over such acts of betrayal. Some individuals, having paid a high price for their negligence, have documented these events—whether they admitted to them with regret or neither acknowledged nor repented. For an example, see Salah Khalaf, pp. 263–264.

protect Palestinian communities, and support its allied Muslim factions in Lebanon.

This is not the place to explore the intricate details, shifting alliances, and reversals of the Lebanese Civil War. In summary, the Palestinian resistance aligned itself with the Druze under the banners of Arab nationalism and leftist ideology—though Islam played a much lesser role—against the Maronite Christians, who were supported by Zionists, Americans, and certain Arab regimes. The conflict ebbed and flowed until the Christian forces began to falter, prompting the Syrian army to intervene in January 1976 with American approval and Israeli consent.[1] The Syrian forces entered as allies of the Maronite Christian factions, turning against the PLO and Fatah.

Under the pretext of restoring order, the Syrian army provided cover for Christian forces besieging Palestinian camps. Ultimately, they betrayed the besieged Palestinians, leading to the Tel al-Zaatar massacre on August 12, 1976, in which approximately 3,000 Palestinians were slaughtered. The war grew increasingly brutal, with Christians and the Syrian army spilling the blood of Palestinians and Lebanese alike in a series of harrowing episodes.

The conflict reached a grim turning point with the Riyadh Agreement, brokered by Saudi Arabia. This accord authorized the deployment of Arab forces to stabilize Lebanon. However, the participating regimes refrained from sending troops, effectively ceding control to the Syrian army. Thus, the Syrian presence in Lebanon was legitimized, gaining Arab approval under the terms of the agreement.

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[1] Hafez al-Assad would not have dared to enter Lebanon without a green light from America and approval from Israel. This is something even those unfamiliar with behind-the-scenes dealings might expect, but it is now documented in several sources. Assad was confronted with this during his lifetime but failed to provide a convincing response. See Salah Khalaf, pp. 300-301, and compare this with the account of Ahmad Jibril, a loyalist and affiliate of the Syrian regime, in *Memory of the Revolution*, p. 280 and beyond.

On the Israeli front, Israel successfully recruited Saad Haddad, a Lebanese Maronite officer, whose forces established a security belt along the southern border, serving as a protective buffer for Israeli interests. Israel's primary objective remained the complete eradication of Palestinian fighters in Lebanon, who continued to maintain strongholds in the south. Meanwhile, Palestinian guerrilla fighters resumed their operations against Israel. In response, the Israeli army launched an invasion of southern Lebanon in March 1978. While the offensive failed to eliminate the guerrilla presence, it reinforced the security belt and strengthened the proxy militia led by Haddad.

Three years later, with Palestinian operations persisting and met by harsh Israeli retaliation against civilians and following Egypt's withdrawal from the conflict after signing the Camp David Accords, Israel launched a full-scale invasion of southern Lebanon. Mobilizing nearly its entire active-duty military force (120,000–150,000 troops out of a total 180,000), the Israeli army reached Beirut in just five days (June 4–9, 1982). A fierce battle ensued between the Israeli army and the combined Palestinian and Lebanese resistance forces. The defenders' determined resistance stalled Israel's advance into Beirut for over two months. Eventually, international mediators brokered an agreement requiring the Palestinian resistance to evacuate Lebanon.

However, following the fighters' withdrawal, Israel and its Maronite Christian allies carried out one of the most brutal massacres in Palestinian history: the Sabra and Shatila massacre (September 16–18, 1982). Approximately 3,500 Palestinians, including women, the elderly, and children, were systematically slaughtered.

The forced expulsion from Lebanon dealt a catastrophic blow to the Palestinian resistance and marked a turning point in its trajectory. It effectively sealed off all avenues for armed struggle, as neighboring states had become inaccessible. The dispersal of

approximately 12,000 guerrilla fighters to distant locations such as Tunisia, Sudan, and Yemen significantly weakened their operational capabilities. The PLO leadership relocated to Tunis, but Israel's intelligence services continued targeting key Palestinian figures. Among them was Abu Jihad, the deputy leader of Fatah, who was assassinated in Tunis on April 16, 1988.

These operations, while showcasing the resilience, courage, and audacity of Palestinian fighters, ultimately faced a profound imbalance of power that worked against them. They stood isolated against a rising military state, surrounded by the apathy and inaction of neighboring Arab regimes, particularly the bordering states. Some, like Egypt, had entered formal peace agreements with Israel, while others, such as Jordan and Syria, maintained de facto peace arrangements. Those not officially aligned with Israel often engaged in covert security and intelligence cooperation, as seen with Lebanon, Morocco, and others. Adding to this challenge was the unwavering support Israel received from Western nations, not only through financial aid, arms, and political backing, but also through operational assistance. Embassies and safe houses frequently served as sanctuaries and launch points for elite Israeli operatives. Meanwhile, the global Jewish diaspora provided consistent and multifaceted support to Israel's cause.

Compounding these difficulties, certain external operations—such as plane hijackings and airport attacks—alienated both Arab and Western nations, leading to widespread opposition to Palestinian organizations. This resulted in substantial attrition, with political and military leaders being systematically targeted and eliminated through assassinations. In this climate, calls for political solutions, negotiations, and peace gained traction within the Palestinian leadership, a shift further facilitated by the loss of prominent, strong-willed figures.

On a broader ideological level, the sustained military resistance was rooted in secular ideals, which translated into political goals

that the PLO expressed in its rhetoric and objectives. Its aim was to establish a unified Palestine—not as a Jewish or Islamic state, but as a secular one, where all citizens would enjoy equal rights and responsibilities. This vision depended heavily on the repatriation of refugees and the cessation of settlement activities, ensuring a demographic majority for Palestinians and Arabs.[1]

The secularism of the PLO served both as a cause and as a proposed solution. It was a cause in that the global dominance of secularism during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s gave rise to a sweeping intellectual movement that led many young people to turn away from religion, even to the point of opposing it. Beyond this ideological wave, secularism—manifested in both its liberal and communist forms—asserted itself through a series of brutal massacres against Islamic movements, effectively closing off the possibility of turning to Islam for solutions. This left secularism as a practical means to avoid conflict with both Arab regimes and international powers.

Thus, the call for a unified secular state managed to harmonize several elements: the secular foundation of Palestinian resistance factions, the nationalist and pan-Arab rejection of the Zionist entity and its commitment to a Jewish state, and the global secular hegemony—both liberal and communist—that dominated the era. This global framework promoted the idea of a single national state in which all citizens would have equal rights, regardless of religion. For the Palestinians, this idea provided a strategic avenue to appeal to the secular inclinations of major Eastern and Western powers, drawing on the same principles that underpinned the post-World War II international order.

Had these major powers been genuinely committed to secularism, they would have stood with the Palestinians against the Zionists, whose ideology and state embody the very religious exclusivity and racism that secularism professes to reject. However,

[1] Salah Khalaf, pp.64, 113, 220-21, 314.

the Israeli project was not merely a secular colonial enterprise; it was also a Crusader-like project, deeply rooted in religious ideology, which remains an enduring aspect of Western civilization.

The acceptance of a single secular state that would unite Arabs and Jews as equals marked the PLO's first major concession, emerging in the late 1960s. This shift represented a retreat from the demand for Jewish settlers to return to their original homelands.[1] Following the October War and its shocking outcomes, the PLO was compelled to make "bold decisions" that ended the "all or nothing" approach.[2] This resulted in another concession at the 12th National Congress in 1974, where it was acknowledged that political action was a legitimate means of liberating Palestine, thus replacing the once unwavering belief that armed struggle was the sole path to liberation. This shift opened the door to transitional and phased solutions, allowing for the establishment of a Palestinian state on any liberated territory.[3]

A further concession occurred when the PLO, arguably under pressure, accepted the Saudi crown prince's (then Prince Fahd) peace initiative, which called for Israel's withdrawal to the 1967 borders in exchange for recognition. This proposal was adopted by the 1982 Arab Summit in Morocco, effectively recognizing the 1948 Israeli occupation.[4]

Thus, the PLO's military setbacks were mirrored by significant political retreats. The 1980s marked a period of decline for the PLO, as the call for a single secular state in which Arabs and Jews would coexist as equals proved ineffective. However, a dramatic shift would soon occur with the eruption of the largest popular uprising in half a century: the First Palestinian Intifada.

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[1] Muhsin Saleh, p.94.
[2] Salah Khalaf, pp.211, 216 ff.
[3] Muhsin Saleh, p.94.
[4] See Ghazi Ghosiebi, p.179 ff.

The First Intifada of 1987 and the Rise of Islamic Resistance

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, a combination of internal and external dynamics within the Islamic movement and Palestine converged to create fertile ground for the emergence of Islamic resistance. These developments can be summarized as follows:

Normalization and Arab Abdication

The Egyptian regime's embrace of peace and normalization with Israel exposed the futility of relying on Arab regimes for the liberation of Jerusalem and Palestine. It became evident that anyone seeking to achieve this goal would need to rely solely on their own efforts, as the saying goes: *"No one can scratch your back like your own nails."*

Other Arab regimes mirrored this disengagement in varying degrees of passivity or complicity. Some, like Syria, refrained from confronting Israel directly. Others, such as Jordan and Morocco, maintained clandestine relations. The Gulf states offered inconsistent and often contradictory economic and political support. Meanwhile, regimes like Iraq and Libya exploited Palestinian factions for their own political agendas, exacerbating divisions within the Palestinian struggle.

The Islamic Awakening

By the early 1970s, the decline of the leftist movement paved the way for the Islamic awakening to emerge and spread across many countries. Regardless of the underlying causes, what is critical in this context is the remarkable growth and rapid expansion of this movement, particularly in Egypt and the Gulf states.

Egypt, home to a quarter of the Arab population, played a central role in this resurgence. With the highest literacy rates among Arab nations, Egypt produced a steady stream of graduates who went on to occupy key roles in education, judiciary, and various professions across the Arab world, amplifying its influence. Simultaneously, the Gulf states experienced an unprecedented oil boom and financial prosperity, which provided substantial resources to support the Islamic awakening. This surge in funding fueled the spread of Islamic literature, the establishment of religious institutions, and a host of activities promoting Islamic revival.

The 1970s concluded with three monumental events that significantly energized the Islamic awakening: the Iranian Revolution, the Juhayman al-Otaybi incident in Saudi Arabia, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. All three transpired in the pivotal year of 1979. Furthermore, a fourth event, the potential rise of Islamists in Türkiye under Necmettin Erbakan's leadership, was thwarted by a brutal military coup in 1980, cutting short another potential milestone for the movement.

The Iranian Revolution, a Shia Islamic uprising, achieved the unprecedented feat of toppling the Shah, one of America's most pivotal allies in the region. For the first time in modern history, religious scholars ascended to power, firmly consolidated their rule, and successfully fended off all attempts to overthrow them. This seismic shift sent shockwaves throughout the region. For the Americans, it represented a dramatic erosion of their influence, while for Islamists, it symbolized the dawn of a new era—one of reclaiming agency and breaking free from decades of occupation and subjugation.

At its outset, the Iranian Revolution adopted a measured strategy, carefully avoiding confrontation with Sunni Muslims and steering clear of sectarian rifts, which had remained largely dormant during the secular era. The revolution decisively cut ties

with Israel, embracing Palestine and its representatives with open support.[1]

The revolution's most profound impact on the Palestinian cause lay in the questions it stirred within the Islamic movement: *Why aren't we resisting? Why aren't we rising?* It shattered the illusion of impossibility, proving that Islamic-driven change could succeed. This awakening did not linger in the realm of rhetoric. It catalyzed action, setting the wheels of Islamic resistance into motion.[2]

The **Juhayman Incident** was a small-scale rebellion led by a Saudi group in the Grand Mosque in Mecca at the dawn of the 15th Hijri century, proclaiming the appearance of the Mahdi. Although Saudi security forces, with the assistance of French and foreign operatives, quickly suppressed the uprising, its repercussions were far-reaching. The incident resonated deeply with Muslims, including many who were present at the mosque, revealing a widespread yearning to break free from an era of defeat and humiliation. This sentiment led to significant sympathy for the movement, with some even joining its ranks.

The rebellion also laid bare growing dissatisfaction among the people of the Arabian Peninsula with Saudi policies, which at the time leaned toward secularization and displayed evident signs of moral decline. Many were discontented and awaiting an opportunity to challenge the regime. As a result, the Juhayman Incident became a watershed moment that compelled the Saudi government to alter its public posture. While it adopted an outwardly Islamic and Salafi façade, it continued its underlying course of secularization, Westernization, and foreign dependency. This strategy mirrored the approach of the kingdom's founder, Abdulaziz Al Saud, who maintained a veneer of religiosity while

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[1] For more about this, see Fahmi al-Huwiedi, *Irān min al-Dākhil* (*Iran from Inside*).

[2] For an examination of the impact of the Iranian Revolution on a leader of the Palestinian resistance, Fathi Shaqaqi, refer to his *Complete Works* (*al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmilah*), pages 190 onward, 218 onward, and 258 onward.

aligning his policies and state-building efforts with the interests of foreign powers.

This duality endured for nearly four decades, culminating in the reign of King Salman and his son, Mohammed bin Salman. Under their leadership, Saudi Arabia took unprecedented steps to dismantle traditional norms, ushering in an era of rampant moral decline and societal liberalization on a scale previously unimaginable.

Meanwhile, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan sparked a wave of jihad across the Islamic world, especially after the Afghans demonstrated extraordinary resilience and unexpected endurance. This caught the Americans off guard, prompting them to support the jihad by facilitating the movement of Muslims to join the fight and covertly supplying weapons and equipment through Arab countries, particularly Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states.

This development rekindled the question of jihad in Palestine and even created opportunities for some to establish training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan, preparing young recruits for jihad in Palestine. The logic was compelling: if the Afghans, despite their small numbers, poverty, and weakness, could stand firm against the formidable Soviet machine, why couldn't the Palestinians do the same against Israel?

These three pivotal events, combined with the momentum of the Islamic awakening in the 1970s and 1980s, created a decisive turning point in the Palestinian cause and the struggle for Jerusalem.

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The Decline of Secular Resistance Movements

By the mid-1980s, it was evident that the secular resistance movements were either in decline or on the brink of collapse. This decline culminated when the Fatah movement was forced to leave Lebanon after the Israeli invasion of 1982. The movement's

members scattered to countries like Yemen, Libya, and Algeria, while the Fatah leadership relocated to Tunisia—a nation distant from Palestine and unable to serve as a viable base for resistance. This marked the effective expulsion of the resistance from Palestine, and, in the following years, from its neighboring states: Jordan in 1970 and Lebanon in 1982.

Looking at the results of these movements over the two decades from 1965 to 1985, their accomplishments appear underwhelming, despite the considerable resources at their disposal—territory, funding, training camps, and occasional Arab and international backing.[1]

Moreover, the financial scandals, moral failings, and internal conflicts within these movements created an atmosphere of disillusionment that caused many to lose faith in them and withdraw their support. This growing disenchantment made it easier for people to abandon any hope that these movements could achieve their objectives.

Additionally, these movements found themselves embroiled in a leftist struggle that led them into direct conflict with the ruling regimes in Jordan and Lebanon, as they sought to establish armed strongholds. This put them at odds with many, including those sympathetic to Palestine, as well as with the regimes themselves. Although these regimes were neither genuinely nationalistic nor truly committed to Arabism and Palestine, these movements' confrontational and arrogant approach provided a convenient excuse for the regimes to suppress and dismantle them, often with the aid of local factions disillusioned with the movements.

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[1] The financial and political resources available to movements such as Fatah, the Popular Front, the Democratic Front, and others were relatively significant, especially when compared to what would be available to Islamic movements in later years, resources that the latter would not even receive a fraction of. Nevertheless, despite the scale of this support, these resources were still inadequate to build a resistance movement capable of confronting a military state that enjoyed continuous political, economic, and military backing.

Furthermore, the intellectual foundations of these movements—rooted in leftist, secular, and nationalist ideologies—had already suffered significant blows, diminishing their appeal, particularly when compared to the 1950s and 1960s. The Arab nationalist project was dealt a crushing blow with the 1967 defeat, and the influence of leftist and communist ideologies continued to decline in the 1970s and 1980s as the Islamic awakening gained momentum, especially in Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula. This ideological shift widened the rift between the people and these movements, many of which had become increasingly extreme in their secularism, atheism, and indulgence in immoral behaviors such as dancing, drinking, and violence.

Finally, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) made a series of political concessions, starting with the demand for a single Palestinian state and the return of the Jews to their land. This was followed by the acceptance of a secular state where Palestinians and Jews would have equal rights and responsibilities, then the endorsement of a two-state solution on part of the land, and finally the shift from the belief that armed struggle was the only solution to acknowledging it as merely one of several options. It became evident, even to those who had remained supportive of the PLO up until that point, that the organization and its movements had grown weary, depleted, and drained of vitality.[1]

The experience of secular resistance movements became a source of regret and reproach within the Islamic movement. The prevailing sentiment is that had the founding members of Fatah been from the Muslim Brotherhood, and had they not left the group solely out of a desire for resistance, their vision would have

[1] For insight into the reflections within Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organization, see Salah Khalaf's *Palestinian Without Identity*, p. 215 and onwards. Interestingly, in the later part of his memoirs, this steadfast leader writes, "Palestinians and Israelis were destined to understand each other, but before that, they must first acknowledge the facts, recognize one another, and accept the need for coexistence on the same land." (p. 312).

been more fruitful. If the Brotherhood had engaged more fully with their goals, the results could have been more successful. The movement might have avoided the secular and moral decay that infiltrated it, as well as the painful failures they endured. Fatah's decline and the rise of secularism within the resistance were a continuous source of frustration and disappointment for those who viewed the situation through the lens of Islamic values. This was especially true considering that many of the key figures in Fatah had previously been part of the Islamic movement, which failed to grasp the urgency of the moment, misjudged its course, and squandered a golden opportunity.

These converging factors—Arab normalization, the Islamic awakening, and the decline of secular resistance movements—created a fertile ground for the emergence of the Islamic resistance movement, Hamas.

The first Islamic organizations were founded under the leadership of Dr. Fathi al-Shaqaqi, who believed that Islamists were now capable of engaging in resistance and that it was both irresponsible and unacceptable for them not to do so. He was deeply troubled by the existing divide, which he captured in the phrase, "Nationalists without Islam, and Islamists without Palestine."[1] In 1980, he established the Islamic Jihad Movement, breaking away from the Brotherhood after realizing they remained steadfast in their old stance. The movement's armed wing began to take shape in the summer of 1981, with its first operation occurring in 1986, known as the Bab al-Magharbah operation, during which they targeted approximately eighty Israeli soldiers. This marked the start of a series of subsequent operations.[2]

Fathi al-Shaqaqi's split from the Muslim Brotherhood was one of the final significant splits. Born within or close to the group—

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[1] Fathi al-Shaqaqi, vol.1, p.347.

[2] Al-Shaqaqi himself wrote about the founding and ideology of the movement. See *The Complete Works*, vol.1, p.346 and beyond.

depending on the account—he was part of the movement that would ultimately lead him to resistance. To this day, there is limited and fragmented information about the formation of Hamas and its connection to the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, particularly in Gaza, which remains the center of the Islamic movement. However, the available details suggest that Hamas represented a quiet coup or a smooth takeover of the Brotherhood's presence in Palestine. The approach introduced by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin contradicted the Brotherhood's established methods in the region, methods they had long accepted and adhered to.

As a result, some of the founding leaders of Hamas managed this quiet takeover with skill and tact, keeping the Brotherhood's banner intact while quietly sidelining leaders who resisted the shift towards a more militant stance. Some of these leaders acted with sincerity and selflessness, choosing to step down from their positions[1] without causing major disruptions that could have led to an open rift, thus serving the broader Islamic movement in Palestine.

In general, instances of leaders stepping down are rare, as leadership disputes are often at the heart of splits and divisions within Islamic movements. Such acts of selflessness typically require a high level of personal integrity.

Although Sheikh Ahmed Yassin later symbolized a departure from the Muslim Brotherhood's traditional stance, he did not join Fatah during its early days and outright rejected its foundational approach. He argued that this method would yield no meaningful results. Launching armed resistance from weak Arab states, in his view, would only enable Israel to expand further into other territories and allow those regimes to dominate resistance efforts. Instead, he advocated that resistance should originate exclusively from within the occupied territories, and if this was not

[1] Sheikh Abd al-Fattah Dukhkhan is an example of such leadership.

immediately possible, he proposed working systematically toward that goal.[1]

While the period of Islamist abstention from resistance led to the loss of invaluable opportunities, it was not entirely unproductive. Islam's dynamic nature and the energy it inspired in its followers were channeled into charitable, educational, and missionary activities, along with vibrant student activism. During the broader Islamic revival of the 1970s and 1980s, Islamists expanded significantly, establishing numerous social and institutional frameworks, including educational, charitable, and missionary organizations both in Palestine and among the Palestinian diaspora. Over time, Palestinian student unions increasingly came under Islamist influence,[2] and Palestinian society began producing an elite Islamic leadership whose vision contrasted sharply with Fatah and the PLO's secular orientation.

Consequently, when the Islamic Resistance Movement eventually emerged, it did so with the backing of extensive and deeply rooted social networks.[3] This strong foundation ensured that its sudden rise was both formidable and far-reaching.

The early stages of Hamas' development trace back to 1980, when select young members were sent abroad for military training. By 1981, the movement had established a security apparatus dedicated to gathering intelligence, tracking Palestinian collaborators working with the Zionists, and identifying recruits enlisted as agents. This apparatus effectively uncovered some collaborators and discreetly held them accountable without public disclosure.[4]

Subsequently, Hamas founded a military wing tasked with recruiting young fighters and acquiring weapons—both perilous

[1] Ahmed Mansour, p.76 ff, p.88. Also, see Ahmad Jibril, pp.100-02
[2] Ahmed Mansour, p.84 ff.
[3] Ibid., 125.
[4] Ibid., p.127 ff.

endeavors in an occupied environment, particularly under a regime built on stringent security measures. These challenges were exacerbated by limited expertise, requiring reliance on a trial-and-error approach.

Despite the risks, progress was deliberate and covert. The military wing executed several operations that led to the killing or capture of Israeli soldiers. However, the exposure of some military cells eventually resulted in arrests, including the detention of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in 1984.[1]

Some sources suggest that the first half of the 1980s witnessed a troubling decline in resistance activities, particularly within Palestine.[2] Even more alarming was the growing normalization and adaptation between large segments of Palestinian society and the Jewish population. In some cases, interactions between the two sides began to resemble natural relationships. Many Palestinians worked in Israeli areas, often spending a week or more away from their hometowns, residing at their workplaces in the territories occupied since 1948. Meanwhile, Israeli traders frequented markets in Gaza and the West Bank.

Over time, prolonged exposure, increased familiarity, and a reduction in immediate threats allowed Jewish presence to permeate Palestinian society, initially through commerce and later extending to social interactions. This dynamic, in turn, led to periods of social alienation and rejection of resistance activities within certain sectors of Palestinian society.

This situation is not surprising, as it reflects the natural dynamics of societal behavior under pressure. It is crucial to remember the dire circumstances of the time, during which Israel,

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[1] Ibid., p.119 ff.

[2] I personally heard this from some leaders of the Hamas movement during various public meetings, as well as from eyewitnesses of that period. References to this can also be found in other sources; see, for example, Abdel Wahab El-Messiri, *My Intellectual Journey*, pp. 524–25.

with the cooperation of Arab governments, dealt severe blows to resistance movements. The most notable of these were the events in Jordan in 1970 and Lebanon in 1982, along with a prolonged campaign of assassinations that targeted key resistance leaders in Europe, Lebanon, Tunisia, and other locations. These actions created a widespread perception that resistance was not only futile but also dangerously counterproductive, particularly as several Arab states began pursuing peace agreements and normalizing relations with Israel.

This growing normalization and the increasing acceptance of the Jewish presence within Palestinian society emboldened Israel to take unprecedented steps. It began collaborating with certain individuals and forming small administrative bodies in villages to handle the daily governance of Palestinian society. This initiative followed Israel's success in dismantling and neutralizing the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) abroad.

Given this context, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and his companions prioritized countering the normalization and adaptation spreading within Palestinian society, particularly among the youth. Their missionary and mobilization efforts were dedicated to reinforcing the understanding that these individuals were occupiers, that they represented an ongoing colonial project, and that coexistence with them under any circumstances was utterly unacceptable.

The rise of the Islamic movement faced numerous obstacles and challenges, the most significant of which were twofold:

First: The societal estrangement from Islamic practices and activities, alongside the dominance of leftist ideologies. One of the founding leaders of the Qassam Brigades noted that his village, Salfit, was once dubbed "Little Moscow" due to the pervasive influence of communism and atheism. This was reflected in the absence of hijab, the dwindling presence of youth in mosques,

hostility toward Islamists, and similar conditions that marked a stark departure from Islamic values.[1]

Second: The opposition from the Fatah movement, which viewed the rise of Islamic leadership as a direct threat to its dominance. This opposition escalated to assassinations, bombings targeting the homes of Islamic leaders, student clashes, and even hostility within Israeli prisons, where Hamas detainees were subjected to persecution instigated by Fatah supporters. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin skillfully navigated this volatile situation, striking a balance between avoiding internal conflict and refusing to allow the movement to be demeaned or rendered defenseless. His strategy succeeded, enabling the Islamic movement to withstand these challenges without fracturing internally or losing its stature and momentum.[2]

The movement's military wing was reconstituted after its disruption in 1984. A turning point came when the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine captured three Israeli soldiers during the Lebanon War and exchanged them for 1,200 Palestinian prisoners, including Sheikh Yassin, who had served only eleven months of a thirteen-year sentence.[3] Following his release, Sheikh Yassin resumed his efforts in 1986. However, Hamas did not formally announce its existence until the eruption of the First Intifada in December 1987.

A Zionist truck driver deliberately ran over a group of Palestinian workers, igniting a wave of anger within Palestinian society. Lacking weapons, the unarmed community could only respond by throwing stones. This eruption of fury became known as the "Intifada of Stones." In its early days, it was led by students from the Islamic University of Gaza. The Islamic movement,

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[1] Zahir Jabarin, *Hikayat al-Dam: min Sharayin al-Qassam*, (*The Story of Blood: From the Arteries of al-Qassam*), p.25 ff.
[2] Ahmed Mansour, p.104 ff., p.156; Ibrahim Gosheh, pp.167-68.
[3] Ahmed Mansour, p.147 ff.

which had been preparing for such a moment for years, decided to intervene, escalating the situation and moving the intifada from the university, which the Israelis had closed, to the streets, squares, and mosques.[1]

The intifada quickly spread throughout Palestine, and the people—who had seemed subdued, weakened, and worn down, as though Israel had extinguished the seeds of resistance and its leaders—rose up once again in defiance of the occupation. This sudden uprising took both the Israeli and Palestinian leadership by surprise.[2] Revolutionary actions emerged across all segments of society, amplifying the widespread resistance, including strikes, tax refusals, and boycotts of Israeli civil authority. For the first time, it seemed that the internal Palestinian community, long subdued and normalized, had seized the initiative, following the decline of resistance movements operating from abroad.

However, this intifada also introduced a new and dangerous element for the Israelis and their allies: the rise of Islamic organizations. These groups brought a fresh perspective to the struggle. While the Palestine Liberation Organization had once pursued a vision of a single state where Jews and Arabs coexisted, the Islamic organizations revived the idea of liberating all of Palestine, from the river to the sea. This vision was presented as a sacred cause, deeply rooted in religious principles, making any compromise or concession not only difficult but unthinkable, starkly contrasting with the more pragmatic, secular approach of organizations that worked within the realm of what was deemed possible.

The occupation employed a range of punitive measures, starting with the brutal practice of breaking bones. Palestinian youths were captured, and their arms or hands were intentionally fractured. These actions escalated to include arrests,

[1] Ibid., p.169 ff.
[2] Fathi al-Shaqaqi, vol.1, p.358 ff.

imprisonment, torture, the deployment of tear gas grenades, and, ultimately, shootings resulting in fatalities. Over the six years of the intifada, the toll included more than 1,500 martyrs, approximately 130,000 injuries, and around 120,000 detentions.

In addition to widespread protests, other significant operations occurred, such as the abduction of Israeli soldiers, an intensified targeting of collaborators, and several armed attacks on settlements and Jewish sites. These developments confounded the Israelis, particularly as no group—including Hamas—claimed responsibility for these operations, adding to the confusion surrounding the events.[1]

Following the official announcement of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Israel launched an aggressive campaign to apprehend its members and suspected leaders. In its initial stages, numerous leaders were detained in Gaza and the West Bank alongside others. Nevertheless, field activities, including organizing the intifada and issuing statements, persisted without interruption.

During this period, the Jordanian regime made a significant and contentious decision by announcing its disengagement from the West Bank on July 31, 1988, leaving the territory's fate to the Palestinians.[2] This effectively ceded greater control to Israel and exacerbated internal Palestinian disputes over governance under occupation. The move further strengthened the occupation's hold during a particularly critical juncture.

Some analysts suggest that King Hussein's decision stemmed from his need to escape two conflicting pressures he could no longer manage simultaneously. The first came from the Jordanian

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[1] Ahmed Mansour, p.159 ff.

[2] The West Bank, according to the Jordanian constitution, was part of the Hashemite Kingdom. King Hussein himself declared in the 1960s that "the unity of the two banks is a unity blessed by God, supported by the people, and a pioneering nucleus for greater unity." See the text of King Hussein's speech in the city of Ajloun on June 14, 1966, in Ahmad Al-Shuqeiri*, Complete Works,* 5/379.

Arab populace, which included a significant Palestinian demographic that had taken refuge in Jordan during various upheavals. This group pushed for stronger support of the intifada and a more decisive role in resisting the occupation, particularly since, under Jordan's constitution at the time, the West Bank was still considered Jordanian territory.

The second pressure emanated from Israel, which demanded increased political, security, and even military collaboration from the Jordanian regime. Such demands threatened the monarchy's survival, as King Hussein, despite his alignment with Zionist interests, maintained a façade of staunch pan-Arab rhetoric to preserve legitimacy among his people.

However, the sequence of events indicates a more insidious motive. The disengagement decision effectively rejuvenated the political standing of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) by ceding the representation of the West Bank population to it. The PLO quickly capitalized on this opportunity, convening its 19th National Council three months later. This meeting marked a pivotal shift in Fatah and the PLO's stance, signaling a betrayal of their earlier positions and setting the stage for actions that would ultimately undermine the Palestinian intifada.

During the conference, the PLO accepted the 1947 UN Partition Plan for Palestine and advocated for a political resolution to the conflict. This move signaled recognition of Israel and a willingness to forgo claims to the lands occupied in 1948. To avoid presenting the conference solely as a series of concessions, the PLO also proclaimed the so-called independence of Palestine. Although it lacked any practical capacity for achieving independence, the declaration provided many states and regimes with an opening to recognize "Palestine"—or, more accurately, the leadership now steering it toward political compromise and

surrender. Meanwhile, Western nations continued to withhold recognition from both Palestine and the PLO.[1]

The Palestinian cause was betrayed twice, at two distinct stages, under two conflicting banners. First, it was undermined under the guise of Arabism and nationalism, which deprived the Palestinian people of the right to establish independent leadership and representation. At that time, the claim was that Palestine's liberation was a task for armies, not guerrilla groups, thus obstructing Palestinians from engaging in popular armed resistance and guerrilla warfare. Later, after Arab regimes handed all of Palestine to the Zionists, a second betrayal occurred, this time under the banner of nationalism. It was argued that it was Palestinians that were best suited to champion their cause and defend their land's independence. This transition, however, was orchestrated only after the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) leadership had been weakened, worn down, and directed toward a path of submission and desperate negotiation.[2]

Despite these political maneuvers, the intifada burned fiercely on the ground. During the uprising, armed resistance began to solidify and refine its capabilities. Hamas' military wing-initiated operations with the abduction of two Israeli soldiers in 1989. Though this initial effort was suppressed, the group reorganized and re-emerged in 1990 as the "Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades." The new organization quickly gained momentum, and by 1993, it had conducted around 140 operations that killed 80 Israelis and injured more than 200.[3]

What stands out as truly extraordinary is that much of this success emerged through a process of trial and error, adapting and learning from setbacks and sacrifices. The speed at which the

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[1] Abdullah Azzam, vol.1, p.853; Muhsin Saleh, pp.109-10.
[2] Refer to Hamas Statement No. 28, issued on August 18, 1988, addressing the disengagement decision and warning of its repercussions and consequences.
[3] Muhsin Saleh, pp.106-07.

resistance progressed from its beginnings to these achievements—within an oppressive environment and with no prior experience—is a striking testament to its resilience and determination.[1]

The uprising, often called the "Intifada of Stones," was also widely known as the "Intifada of Mosques." This designation stemmed from its roots in mosques,[2] its momentum building weekly after Friday prayers, and the leadership's overtly Islamic orientation. The movement was marked by Islamic slogans, the prevalence of Islamic preachers, and the emergence of Islamic factions, underscoring its distinctly Islamic identity. This did not preclude participation by members of leftist and nationalist movements, whose involvement did not undermine the uprising's broadly Islamic character.

In response, Israel launched a sweeping crackdown, arresting over 400 Islamic leaders from the West Bank and Gaza and exiling them to Lebanon. However, these exiled leaders defied the expulsion by staging a sit-in at Marj al-Zohour, a remote and harsh location in southern Lebanon. Setting up a makeshift camp in freezing, inhospitable conditions, they turned their ordeal into an opportunity that yielded significant achievements:

1. **A clear distinction from PLO leadership**: This new wave of Islamic leaders starkly contrasted with PLO figures, who had become entrenched in foreign countries' politics and often pursued personal interests far from Palestine.

2. **A profound commitment to Palestine**: The exiled leaders demonstrated their unwavering attachment to their homeland, persisting at the border under dire conditions and seeking a return, even at great personal risk. Their defiance was a powerful and inspiring act of resilience.

[1] See for example, Zahir Jabarin, p.36 ff.
[2] Ahmed Mansour, pp.174-75.

3. **A unique chance for unity**: The congregation of these leaders in one location created a rare and invaluable opportunity for strategic coordination, allowing them to consolidate plans and strengthen their organizational efforts, an impossible feat under the constraints within Palestine.

4. **Amplified media attention**: The sit-in became a focal point for Arab and international media, shedding light on this unprecedented form of resistance. It highlighted the distinct character of these Islamic leaders, differentiating them from the PLO's approach.

5. **An exponential rise in Hamas' influence**: These events led to a dramatic surge in Hamas' popularity, with its leadership gaining increased symbolic and practical significance. This not only solidified their standing but also reinforced their broader appeal and impact.[1]

One of the most significant outcomes of the intifada was the shift of the Palestinian resistance's battleground and leadership to within Palestine itself. Previously, the resistance had been based abroad—first in Jordan, then in Lebanon. This internalization of the resistance intensified the threat to the occupation, as local fighters were intimately familiar with the terrain and uniquely positioned to direct the conflict and fulfill its operational needs. As the saying goes, "A single soldier within the homeland is worth more than a hundred outside it, and a single rifle inside is worth more than a hundred beyond its borders."[2]

The resistance thrived within its natural Palestinian social base, unrestrained by the political compromises and calculations that often burden external regimes. Unlike organizations operating from abroad, it had no vested interests to protect. Most importantly, the resistance was fluid and had yet to formalize into

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[1] About the event of Marj al-Zuhour, see Adnan Masudi, *Ilā al-Muwājahah*, p.111 ff.
[2] Zahir Jabarin, p.121.

public institutions or structures that could be easily targeted or dismantled. Its clandestine nature allowed it to move seamlessly within a supportive, aggrieved population, creating a dynamic that posed immense challenges for any attempts at suppression.

The Oslo Accords and the Formation of the Palestinian Authority

In modern history, foreign occupiers, when unable to suppress a revolution, often resort to alternative, more insidious strategies. One such tactic involves fostering or enabling a subservient leadership—or one characterized by weakness or corruption—to take over as the representative of the movement. Once this happens, the revolution's purpose is undermined, its unity shattered, and its momentum dissipated, leaving it vulnerable to collapse under even the slightest pressure.[1]

At that time, Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), was at the lowest point of his career. His leadership had become synonymous with a string of disastrous failures—even if one were to view his actions with the most charitable interpretation and disregard the numerous suspicions surrounding him. He had been expelled from Jordan in 1970 and later forced out of Lebanon in 1982, both times defeated and humiliated. The assassination of key strongmen and prominent cadres within the PLO and Fatah further weakened his position,

[1] This pattern was evident in Egypt following the 1919 revolution against British rule. The British ensured that the leadership of the revolution fell into the hands of one of their trusted allies, Saad Zaghloul. Under his guidance, the once-powerful revolution was channeled into prolonged negotiations that dragged on for thirty years without achieving meaningful results, allowing British occupation to maintain its grip on Egypt. This scenario repeated itself in countless liberation movements throughout the twentieth century. Time and again, the people—particularly the Islamists—bore the brunt of sacrifices and paid the ultimate price, only for the fruits of their struggle to be seized by collaborators and loyalists of the occupiers.

while the frequency and impact of operations carried out by his organization had plummeted.

Meanwhile, Arab states began abandoning the Palestinian cause. Egypt took the first step with its peace treaty in 1979, followed by Prince Fahd's 1982 initiative, which was endorsed by the Arab Summit in Fez, Morocco. Even the Arab regimes that opposed normalization and peace agreements provided no meaningful support. They withheld funding and distanced themselves from Arafat. The Assad regime turned its back on him during his time in Lebanon, and Gaddafi followed suit. These regimes sought to subordinate him, treating the Palestinian cause as little more than a bargaining chip for advancing their own interests.

Arafat's precarious position worsened when he made the fateful mistake of supporting Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. This decision enraged Kuwait and the Gulf states, which had been among the PLO's primary financial backers. Following Saddam's defeat and the U.S.-led intervention in the Gulf, Arafat found himself isolated and deeply weakened, both within the Arab world and among Palestinians. His situation had become one of utter desperation and disarray.

To the best of my knowledge, it remains unclear who first proposed the idea of using Yasser Arafat to undermine the Palestinian intifada by positioning him as its leader. This marked an unprecedented shift in the history of the Palestinian struggle, as it was the first time the occupiers permitted the establishment of a political leadership for the Palestinian people—something that had been strictly forbidden since the British occupation began. Previous attempts at leadership were limited to elevating minor figures to oversee municipal affairs and public services, never to politically represent the people.

The widespread Islamic intifada demonstrated that a leaderless population could still pose a significant and persistent threat. Its

fluid and decentralized nature created constant challenges, as dismantling one group only led to the emergence of another. This dynamic prompted the realization that establishing a compliant and subservient Palestinian leadership could serve the occupiers' interests better than direct control.[1] The precedent set by Arab regimes, with their ability to suppress their populations and protect Israel, further strengthened this idea. Observing how neighboring states effectively safeguarded Israel while restraining their citizens solidified the belief that a similar Palestinian authority could offer a long-term solution.

The long-standing arrangement governing Arab regimes since Israel's founding was their implicit role in ensuring its security in exchange for international support that sustained their power. This unspoken bargain fostered a competition among aspiring leaders, each vying for Israeli approval to secure American endorsement for their rule.

At this pivotal moment, Yasser Arafat emerged as the Palestinian leader willing to take on this role. For him, it was a lifeline, a chance to reclaim relevance after a long history of failures and missteps. Without it, he risked fading into obscurity, becoming just another sidelined Palestinian figure forgotten by history and overtaken by events.

Throughout his career, Arafat exhibited a multifaceted, elusive, and slippery personality, so much so that a former CIA Director later described him as "the most complicated person I have ever dealt with, without question."[2] He displayed a despotic tendency,

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[1] Zaher Jabarin, one of the founders of the Qassam Brigades in the West Bank and currently a Hamas leader, recalls in his memoirs that an Israeli interrogator told him that the military operations carried out by the resistance were the reason for allowing the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to enter Palestine. The interrogator added, "Had it not been for you, we wouldn't have given them anything. If we hadn't done this, we would have had a second Lebanon." See Zaher Jabarin, *The Story of Blood*, p. 55.

[2] George Tenet: *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*, p.110 [Arabic Edition].

particularly when it came to controlling both weaponry and finances within the Palestinian movement. Numerous obscure and enigmatic aspects of his life remain unexplored, and this space is too brief to fully address them. However, the key point here is that Arafat had become the right figure to make the necessary concessions at this critical juncture in his career.[1]

On the international stage, significant changes were also unfolding. The Soviet Union collapsed, and the United States emerged as the region's sole superpower. The U.S. further solidified its dominance by dismantling Iraq's power following Saddam Hussein's failed invasion of Kuwait and his attempt to control the Gulf. These global shifts led to a series of crucial outcomes, the most significant of which, in the context of our discussion, is:

1. The disintegration of Arab regimes, which once again appeared weak and vulnerable. These regimes were either unable to defend themselves against external threats, leading them to rush into the arms of the Americans, or powerless when the Americans arrived on their doorstep.

2. The withdrawal of strong backing from countries once under Soviet influence, such as Syria, Iraq, Libya, and others. While this did not immediately force them into surrender, it left them too weak to confront Israel or offer substantial support to the Palestinians.

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[1] It is noteworthy that Arafat was the only prominent figure within Fatah who was not assassinated. His rivals were either eliminated through assassination or forced into exile when they posed a threat to his leadership. While some of the criticism against him may have been motivated by personal rivalries, as reflected in the memoirs of leftists and Islamists, it was also voiced by respected independent scholars known for their integrity. For instance, Anis Sayigh, a distinguished Christian nationalist historian, accused him of financial and administrative corruption, as well as dishonesty. Likewise, Dr. Walid Sayegh, an independent linguist, intellectual, and novelist, mentioned in his memoirs the long-standing communications between Arafat and Israel. See Anis Sayigh, *On Anis Sayigh*, p. 289 and beyond, and Walid Saif, *The Witness and the Witnessed*, p.

3. The second displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, particularly those residing in Kuwait (a Gulf state with a significant Palestinian population) and Iraq, during Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and his subsequent expulsion by international forces. This compounded their suffering, halted much-needed funding, and decimated vital Palestinian resources, further straining relations with the Gulf states, which viewed Arafat's alignment with Saddam as an unforgivable error.

4. The massive influx of Jewish immigrants from the collapsed Soviet Union, with over a million arriving in Israel within ten years of its collapse. Among them were many highly skilled professionals in science and the military, bolstering Israel's capacity.

5. In the end, this set the stage for a grimmer reality: the Palestinian cause became increasingly marginalized, while Israeli influence grew stronger and more dominant.[1]

Yasser Arafat found himself on the losing side by aligning with Saddam Hussein, which heightened his desperate need for a way out. Meanwhile, American victory and the collapse of the Soviet Union prompted the Americans and Israelis to entertain a new proposal: the creation of a weak, subservient Palestinian authority that could serve as a convenient solution to the persistent problems posed by the Palestinians.

Amid these developments, Arafat made yet another perilous concession, as previously mentioned. In 1988, he abandoned the long-held goal of a single secular state—neither Jewish nor Islamic—and accepted the two-state solution: a Palestinian state alongside a Jewish state. This Palestinian state was to be established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, based on the pre-1967 borders. This marked the first major concession regarding historical

[1] Fathi al-Shiqaqi, vol.1, p.339 ff; Muhsin Saleh, pp.111-12.

Palestine and represented the initial step toward recognizing the Zionist Jewish state.

International powers revealed their betrayal of the secular principles they had once championed, endorsing the Jewish state while abandoning the secular Palestinian movement that had called for a single, secular state. They even pressured those advocating for a secular state to accept the existence of a Jewish state alongside them. As noted earlier, if Israel were simply a secular colonial project, the aim would have been the establishment of a single secular state. However, Israel is intrinsically tied to a Crusader ideology, inseparable from the West, and is one of the cornerstones of its civilization.[1]

Thus, the situation became clear: Arafat, the Palestinian leader who had been militarily defeated and politically betrayed, who had abandoned his previous principles and taken a major step toward recognizing Israel, was now poised to become the Trojan horse that would deceive the Palestinian intifada!

A new phase of communication and negotiations began, during which the Israelis sought several key objectives: complete assurance that the Palestinian Authority would remain subordinate, pose no threat to Israel, and effectively manage the Palestinians, suppressing resistance movements. They also wanted the Authority to channel the intifada into negotiations, diffusing its momentum. In return, Arafat aimed to secure as much genuine power as possible, carving out a real political role for himself, either within Palestine or the broader Arab region. He sought to extract as many concessions as he could to redeem himself from the shame and compromises he had made in recognizing Israel and its

[1] In 2006, Richard Koch and Chris Smith authored a book titled *The Suicide of the West*, in which they argue that Western civilization is founded on seven key pillars, one of which is Christianity. The book issues a warning about the gradual erosion of these foundational pillars, which have long supported Western culture and society.

right to exist on more than three-quarters of Palestinian land. He also wanted to distance himself from the role of Israel's security enforcer, quelling the resistance of his people.

These developments unfolded through a series of secret and public meetings, culminating in the Oslo Agreement of 1993.

When considering the balance of power, the nature of the figures involved, and the external backers of both sides, the outcome is tragically clear: the result was the creation of a Palestinian Authority that recognized Israel's right to exist, pledged to maintain its security by fighting the resistance, and relinquished all land occupied before 1967. In return, the Palestinian Authority received only recognition, along with promises of a phased, gradual withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and about five areas in the West Bank.[1] Key issues were deferred for future negotiations, including the status of Jerusalem, the return of refugees, the borders of the Palestinian state, water rights, and the fate of Jewish settlements on land occupied in 1967.

Furthermore, the issue of Palestinian prisoners was entirely neglected in these agreements, leading to lasting consequences for the prisoners themselves and for the values upheld by Fatah members.[2]

Thus, Israel granted Arafat only limited authority, enabling him to take on administrative and security responsibilities that allowed him to control Palestinian society and suppress its resistance. In return, Arafat received only vague promises of continued negotiations for the future. This was the greatest concession ever made in the history of the Palestinian cause, extracted by a "Palestinian leader" brought in to defuse the powerful intifada.

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[1] The West Bank was divided into Areas A, B, and C. Area C, which constitutes the largest portion (60% of the West Bank), is under full Israeli sovereignty and security control. Area B is under shared control, with Israel maintaining the dominant authority, while Area A is fully controlled by the Palestinian Authority.
[2] See, for example, Zaher Jabarin, p.167 ff.

Meanwhile, Israel maintained its occupation policies, strengthening its foothold on the ground, expanding settlements, and furthering the Judaization of Jerusalem. No final resolution was reached on any of these crucial issues, so Israel had no binding obligations. The Palestinian Authority and the Oslo Agreement effectively provided legal cover for the occupation, transforming it from an illegitimate and unlawful presence into one that no longer violated any agreements between the two parties. In other words, Israel effectively secured a cost-free occupation through this agreement.

The Balfour Declaration is often described as "a promise made by one who had no right to one who had no claim," and this rings true in the case of Arafat and the Oslo Agreement. Arafat gave away what he did not own to those who had no claim to it. Palestine was never his to give, neither by Islamic law, which designates it as a *waqf* (endowment) for all Muslims, nor by secular democratic principles, as Arafat was not an elected leader of the Palestinian people. His recognition as the head of the PLO stemmed from official Arab regimes, none of which came to power through a legitimate Islamic pledge of allegiance or through fair democratic elections. Thus, illegitimate regimes recognized an illegitimate organization, which then signed an illegitimate agreement, establishing yet another illegitimate authority in this suffering Arab region.

This critique goes beyond principles, reflecting the devastating consequences of the Oslo Accord. The agreement brought no real gains for the Palestinian people or their cause. Core issues—such as the Palestinian state's size and sovereignty, the status of Jerusalem, the return of refugees, settlements, and water rights—were all deferred. Meanwhile, Israel's security and military control over all territories remained intact, Israel was granted the right to veto legislation enacted by the Palestinian Authority, and the term "occupied" was removed from the West Bank and Gaza.

This development led to a profoundly dangerous outcome orchestrated by the Palestinian Authority: a deep and divisive schism among Palestinians. Some began advocating for a path based on negotiations, peace, normalization, and coexistence, willing to settle for whatever concessions could be secured. Others, however, firmly rejected this as no solution at all, viewing it instead as a deception, and a renewed betrayal.

This division went far beyond mere ideological differences. Arafat and the Palestinian Authority became a faction bolstered by significant financial resources, the promise of lucrative positions, and opportunities for social advancement. This inevitably attracted many to their side, particularly in a society weakened and worn down over decades of hardship, where countless people endured harsh living conditions in squalid refugee camps. Arafat and his authority did not offer a proposal that could be accepted or rejected, as one might expect from a political party. Instead, they planted the seeds of a system that actively reshaped Palestinian society, extending favor or exclusion based on ideological and factional affiliations.

Consequently, supporters of resistance, jihad, and the intifada found themselves branded as criminals and outlaws—this time under the laws of the "national" authority, not just the Zionist occupation. The burden on the resistance fighters grew exponentially, placing them in a situation eerily similar to that of their counterparts in other Arab states, enduring the oppression of so-called national authorities.

The Palestinian National Authority became a focal point for dealing with the Israelis, evolving into a weak and constrained entity wholly dependent on Israel for virtually everything. From the movement of its officials through Israeli military checkpoints to financial transfers and daily coordination for the entry and exit of goods and people, its reliance culminated in the so-called "security coordination and cooperation," which amounted to

outright collaboration. This dynamic presented Israel with an invaluable opportunity to deepen its influence, co-opting numerous officials within the Authority. These officials became de facto subordinates to Israel, advancing its interests more faithfully than their allegiance to Arafat or the Authority itself.

The second-in-command of this Authority, Mahmoud Abbas—the architect of the Oslo Accords—serves as a striking example of its members, embodying the Authority's role as a "brilliant invention" crafted to serve Israel's interests. Throughout his career, Abbas consistently acted as one of Israel's most valuable assets in the Palestinian issue. He ultimately turned against Arafat, and following Arafat's assassination, was elevated to power to continue the process, conceding even more than Arafat had been willing to surrender. Under Abbas's leadership, the Palestinian cause and its people suffered hardships and calamities that might have been unimaginable had he not been at the helm.[1]

This betrayal extended to the leaders of the security apparatus, who became some of the most dangerous collaborators. Jibril Rajoub, head of the Preventive Security Force in the West Bank, and his counterpart, Mohammad Dahlan, head of Preventive Security in Gaza, along with their deputies, provided Israel with intelligence and security assistance that far exceeded what Israel could have achieved through its own efforts. In the detention centers operated by these agencies, numerous resistance fighters were tortured to death. Through these brutal practices, critical intelligence was extracted, exposing many freedom fighters, thwarting countless resistance and martyrdom operations, and squandering innumerable lives, resources, and painstaking preparations.

It is remarkable to note that this weak and constrained Authority, whose president and ministers required Israeli-issued

[1] See, for example, on Abbas: Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices: A Memoir of Hillary Rodham Clinton*, p.308 [Arabic edition.]

permits to pass through checkpoints, witnessed an excessive proliferation of security agencies: Interior Security, General Security, Police, Intelligence, Preventive Security, and Presidential Intelligence, among others.[1] The exact number of these agencies remains a matter of debate among researchers, highlighting the Authority's nature and objectives. The police force alone numbered 40,000 officers, the highest police-to-population ratio globally. Additionally, a staggering 70% of the Authority's total budget was allocated to security agencies and Arafat's office.[2]

Despite the corruption, moral degradation, collaboration, and countless disasters this Authority brought upon a Palestinian society already plagued by poverty, misery, and oppression,[3] Arafat gambled on maintaining his position through another approach. He recognized that his primary role, to solidify his authority, was to suppress Palestinian resistance. In his first speech after arriving in Gaza, Arafat boldly stated that while Nelson Mandela refrained from shooting at the Zulu tribes, he (Arafat) would shoot—referring to Hamas.[4]

Although Arafat managed to stifle large-scale public protests and civil resistance, he failed to completely eradicate armed resistance, which had significantly advanced during and after the intifada. What began as stone-throwing escalated into stabbing attacks targeting Israeli soldiers, forcing them to withdraw from densely populated areas and relocate to heavily fortified military bases, surrounded by checkpoints and reinforced to ensure the security of Jewish settlements.

The emergence of firearms, such as pistols and rifles, marked a new phase in the resistance, accompanied by intensified efforts

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[1] Condoleezza Rice mentions that these agencies numbered at least 12 security organizations. See *Condoleezza Rice: No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington*, p.167 [Arabic edition.]
[2] Muhsin Saleh, p.117.
[3] Ibid., pp.117-18.
[4] Ibrahim Gosheh, p.214.

to smuggle and procure weapons. Palestinian engineers, leveraging available local resources, began producing explosive materials. This ingenuity enabled the resistance to carry out ambushes, detonate military vehicles, and target key officials. Over time, they developed a game-changing and highly impactful tactic: martyrdom operations. These missions involved fighters wearing explosive belts who deliberately entered densely populated Israeli areas to detonate themselves. Such operations allowed the Palestinian resistance to retaliate against massacres and assaults, exemplified by their response to the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre[1] in Hebron (al-Khalil), which included five operations that resulted in around 40 Israeli fatalities and approximately 160 injuries.[2]

The mastermind behind this pivotal shift was a young, inconspicuous engineer named Yahya Ayyash,[3] famously known as "The Engineer." Ayyash displayed exceptional talent in manufacturing and preparing these weapons, along with extraordinary skills in disguise, movement, and self-security. His expertise enabled him to evade detection, even traveling undetected between the West Bank and Gaza. Tragically, Ayyash became a victim of the security collaboration between the Palestinian Authority and the Israelis. In January 1996, he was assassinated when his cell phone—provided by a Palestinian informant working for the Israelis—was rigged with explosives and remotely detonated.

The resistance responded to the assassination of Engineer Ayyash with a series of powerful martyrdom operations, marking a dangerous escalation. This prompted the convening of an international conference on "terrorism" in Sharm El-Sheikh,

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[1] On the morning of February 25, 1994, which coincided with the middle of Ramadan 1414 AH, a Jewish man stormed the Ibrahimi Mosque in the city of Hebron and opened fire on worshippers, killing thirty and injuring 150 others.
[2] See Zahir Jabarin, p.103 ff.
[3] For information about Ayyash's joining the resistance and his beginnings, see Zahir Jabarin, *The Tale of Blood*, p. 45 and onwards. For a look at his military record, virtues, and bravery, refer to p. 182 and onwards.

Egypt, on March 13, 1996. The goal of the conference was to foster international cooperation in suppressing Palestinian resistance, highlighting one of the clearest examples of Arab regimes conspiring against Palestinian efforts and their role in protecting Israel. During the conference, Arafat was explicitly told, "The peace process will end unless you take action on the security issue. You cannot manipulate it; it must be real."[1]

Upon returning from Sharm El-Sheikh, Arafat became more determined and ruthless in his efforts to crush Palestinian resistance. Armed with Israeli support, American tactics, and official Arab backing, he launched a brutal security campaign that severely disrupted the resistance,[2] resulting in the deaths of key figures such as Mahyuddin Al-Sharif (the second engineer), who was tortured to death by Palestinian Preventive Security forces on March 29, 1998, and the brothers Imad and Adel Awadallah, senior leaders of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Adel was arrested, tortured, and his assassination was coordinated with Israeli forces on September 10, 1998. The campaign led to the detention of thousands, many of whom suffered extreme torture, including broken bones and ripped beards, with some even martyred.[3]

Internationally, Israel assassinated Fathi Shaqaqi on October 26, 1995, attempted to assassinate Khaled Meshaal, the head of Hamas' political bureau, in Jordan on September 25, 1997, and closed Hamas' office in Jordan in August 1997. Hamas leaders were imprisoned for two months before being exiled to Qatar.

The Palestinian Authority swiftly advanced its capabilities in repression, torture, and surveillance. This became evident just three months after its establishment in October 1994, when an operation to capture an Israeli soldier led to an Israeli raid that killed both the soldier and his captors. Palestinian Authority forces

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[1] George Tenet, p.80.
[2] Ibid., p.78 ff.
[3] Ibrahim Gosheh, p.228.

also opened fire on a demonstration emerging from a mosque, killing 18 protestors and wounding hundreds. In the aftermath, enraged crowds surrounded the Authority's security headquarters in Gaza, nearly overpowering its personnel.[1]

In Gaza alone, the Authority established 24 detention and interrogation centers. By mid-1995, it had raided 57 mosques a staggering 138 times in just one month. By early 1997, the Authority was detaining 1,600 Palestinians, half of them held without charges or trials.[2] It was not unusual for two members of the same family to be imprisoned for the same accusation of "belonging to Hamas," with one detained by Israeli forces and the other by the Palestinian Authority.[3] Meanwhile, Hamas detainees and their families frequently faced neglect and humiliation from the Authority's Minister of Prisoners.[4]

These efforts contributed to a significant decline in Palestinian resistance activities between 1996 and 2000. This outcome was openly celebrated by the head of American intelligence, who acknowledged the role his agency had played in supporting Arafat and the Authority's security forces. His efforts culminated in the creation of joint operations centers between Israeli and Palestinian security forces, established even before Palestinians received any meaningful political gains.[5]

Simultaneously, Jordan intensified its crackdown on Hamas. The political office of Hamas in Amman was raided, leading to the arrest and torture of sixty young members, the confiscation of the movement's funds, and the forced exile of several prominent leaders and officials abroad.[6]

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[1] Ibrahim Ghoshah, p.218 ff.
[2] Muhsin Saleh, p.118.
[3] Abdullah al-Barghothi, *Amir al-Zill* (*The Prince of Shadows*), p.44.
[4] See, for example, Hasan Salamah, *Khamsat Ālāf Yawm fi ʿĀlam al-Barzakh* (*Five Thousand Days in the Realm of Barzakh*), p.55.
[5] George Tenet, pp.96, 98.
[6] Ibrahim Ghosheh, pp.224, 228 ff.

Despite Arafat's considerable success in undermining the resistance, these efforts failed to yield him any substantial gains in the political process. This trajectory faced a significant setback at the hands of the Israelis, who themselves became divided into two distinct factions.

The first faction, represented by figures such as Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and later Ehud Barak—leaders of the government under the Labor Party—advocated for open-ended peace agreements and negotiations. They believed that engaging with a disarmed, resource-stripped Palestinian Authority, under a starkly asymmetric power dynamic favoring Israel, would ultimately bolster Israel's security and strengthen its position. This approach, they argued, would alleviate Israel of numerous political, financial, security, and administrative burdens,[1] allowing it to redirect its focus toward other regimes that had yet to comply or engage in peace processes, such as Iraq, Syria, and Iran.

Moreover, the two-state solution was seen as a strategic measure to address the demographic threat posed by the high fertility rates and growing population of Palestinians. In a single-state scenario, demographic realities would inevitably shift the balance of power in favor of Palestinians, whether in the near or distant future.[2]

The other faction was embodied by figures such as Benjamin Netanyahu and Ariel Sharon,[3] who led the government under the

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[1] Israel benefited from the peace processes, negotiations, and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, achieving stability and prosperity. Between 1983 and 2000, its GDP grew sevenfold, and grants and aid, which previously constituted a quarter of its budget, dropped to just 3%. The per capita income for Israelis exceeded $18,000, making it one of the highest income levels globally in 2000. See Mohsen Saleh, p. 119.

[2] Hillary Clinton, pp.307-08.

[3] Netanyahu is widely regarded as the most prominent Israeli politician since the founding generation. He holds the record as Israel's longest-serving prime minister, with a total of 17 years in office to date, including an uninterrupted tenure of 11 years. In 1996, at just 47 years old, he became the youngest person to assume the role of prime minister. Before this, he served as deputy foreign

Likud Party or its affiliates. This group adamantly opposed the establishment of a Palestinian state in any form. They viewed the existence of the Palestinian Authority not as a step toward peace but as a potential threat, and a ruse that could enable Palestinians to arm themselves, train fighters, and receive external funding. They also warned that regimes like Iraq, Syria, and Iran might exploit the Authority as a tool to undermine Israel's security.

For this faction, the concept of a Palestinian state represented a reversal of and betrayal to the Zionist-Jewish vision of a state stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates. Guided by this ideology, Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated in 1995, and Likud triumphed in the 1996 elections. The victory stalled peace negotiations for three years, during which settlement expansion around Jerusalem escalated, dramatically reshaping the facts on the ground. In 1999, the Labor Party regained power with Ehud Barak at the helm, rekindling some hope for negotiations.

However, the three-year hiatus revealed the fragility of the Oslo Accords, exposing them as empty promises. Israeli politicians consistently failed to honor their commitments, and the Palestinian Authority lacked the guarantees or leverage needed to hold Israel accountable. During this period, the Authority focused its efforts on suppressing the popular uprising, effectively extinguishing mass resistance while leaving only the core Islamic resistance movements active. These movements, too, were weakened by the

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minister at the age of 39 and as Israel's ambassador to the United Nations at just 35. Significantly, his father was a prominent Zionist historian and a close associate of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, one of Israel's most extreme ideological figures and the architect of its famed deterrence theory.

Sharon, on the other hand, is considered the most distinguished military leader in Israeli history after the founding generation. He participated in all of Israel's wars, earning a reputation as one of its most ruthless and effective fighters. To many Israelis, he is hailed as a national hero, celebrated for his decisive military contributions. Although Sharon was older and more experienced than Netanyahu, the two shared allegiance to the same hardline faction, embodying its uncompromising ideology.

uprising's decline, shrinking public support, and relentless persecution from the Authority's security forces.

These years stand as stark evidence of the Palestinian Authority's catastrophic failure—if not outright complicity. Having used the Oslo process to dismantle the uprising, Israel ultimately abandoned the agreement once it achieved its objective of neutralizing the resistance.

Barak's tenure, which overlapped with Bill Clinton's presidency in the United States, marked a pivotal and revealing chapter in the trajectory of the peace process and its agreements. Barak, widely regarded as one of the most conciliatory Israeli politicians,[1] Clinton, arguably the most dedicated U.S. president to resolving the conflict, and Yasser Arafat, who had formally recognized Israel's right to exist and actively suppressed resistance, convened in July 2000 for what would become yet another failed round of negotiations.

Israel remained steadfast in its refusal to permit the return of Palestinian refugees, grant any Arab sovereignty over Jerusalem, or revert to the 1967 borders—three fundamental issues at the heart of the conflict. Arafat, unwilling to concede on these points, reportedly stated that accepting the proposed agreement would lead to his assassination.[2] His attempts to salvage his position through face-saving proposals, such as transferring sovereignty over Al-Aqsa to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, a largely symbolic and ineffective body, or securing a contiguous land area unbroken by Israeli settlements, also failed. The negotiations collapsed.

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[1] Barak's reputation as "the most conciliatory" is only relative to other Israeli leaders; in truth, he was the architect of the five resolute "no's" he declared before entering negotiations: no to dividing Jerusalem, no to withdrawing to the 1967 borders, no to the return of refugees, no to dismantling settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, and no to the presence of Arab forces in the West Bank.
[2] Condoleezza Rice, p.77.

This period laid bare a sobering truth: even the most accommodating Israeli leader would not concede the basic conditions for establishing a viable Palestinian state, and even the most yielding Palestinian leader could not secure an outcome significant enough to present to his people.

Throughout the periods when the banner of settlement negotiations was raised, attacks on Al-Aqsa Mosque persisted unabated. During Barak's tenure, in September 1996, the Israelis opened a tunnel beneath the western wall of Al-Aqsa Mosque. This provocative action ignited fierce clashes, resulting in the martyrdom of over sixty Palestinians and injuries to more than 160 others.

The Al-Aqsa Intifada

It became undeniably clear that the maximum compromises a Palestinian leader like Arafat could make were still far from meeting the minimum demands of an Israeli leader. Once again, negotiations collapsed in failure.

During this time, retired Israeli General Ariel Sharon—one of Israel's most influential and uncompromising military and political figures—had assumed leadership of the opposition Likud Party. On September 28, 2000, Sharon made a highly provocative visit to Al-Aqsa Mosque, igniting widespread protests that marked the beginning of the second Palestinian uprising, later known as the *Al-Aqsa Intifada*.

Initially, demonstrations and stone-throwing became the primary forms of resistance available to the Palestinian people. Despite facing Israel's formidable machinery of repression, the Palestinian populace demonstrated extraordinary courage and self-sacrifice. The Israeli forces, in turn, responded with brutal measures, including killings, assaults, and mass arrests. Within a matter of days, the death toll surpassed a hundred, then a thousand, with casualties continuing to mount.

As the uprising unfolded, Palestinian resistance factions began intensifying their operations. Over time, large-scale demonstrations and street clashes diminished, giving way to more strategic and advanced resistance actions. Among these, martyrdom operations emerged as the most powerful and devastating weapon wielded by the Palestinian resistance, leaving a significant impact in their struggle against the overwhelming Israeli force.

The situation spiraled out of control, prompting a change in the Israeli government just months after the outbreak of the Intifada. Ariel Sharon assumed leadership of the new government, promising to end the uprising within 100 days of taking office. Despite launching brutal military and security campaigns across various regions, he failed to fulfill his promise. Instead, the conflict escalated into a fierce and unequal struggle, pitting an unarmed yet resilient Palestinian population against Israel's formidable military machine. Sharon implemented a strategy of systematically targeting leaders of militant resistance factions and later expanded these assassinations to include political figures as well.

Initially, Yasser Arafat sought to distance himself from the uprising, subtly curbing the efforts of his security forces to pursue and suppress resistance fighters. He viewed this as a tactical move to pressure Israel into returning to the negotiating table under more favorable terms. However, his strategy backfired. Sharon's ascent to power marked a shift toward outright rejection of negotiations and an aggressive push toward total Israeli control over the territories.

The situation further deteriorated when U.S. President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, left office, and the Republican[1] George W. Bush[2] took over the presidency. Bush's administration bolstered

[1] The Democrats tend to rely more on diplomacy and soft power, while the Republicans are generally more abrasive, and less inclined to use a calm, evasive rhetoric.

[2] George W. Bush was described by his mother as "America's first Jewish president" due to his strong bias toward the Jews (see Condoleezza Rice, p. 177).

Sharon's hardline position while further weakening Arafat's standing. The following year, on September 11, 2001, the United States experienced a devastating domestic attack that shocked the world, deeply wounded American pride, and launched the so-called "Global War on Terror."

In response, the U.S. military invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 and Iraq in March 2003, triggering a global wave of crackdowns on Islamic activism. Initially targeting jihadist groups, this campaign expanded to include charitable, humanitarian, and even political Islamic organizations. Sharon capitalized on this shift, framing his actions as part of the broader fight against Islamic terrorism in Palestine and portraying Yasser Arafat as a central figure in this alleged campaign of terror.

The failure of negotiations and the outbreak of the Intifada undeniably caused significant tension within the Palestinian Authority's (PA) institutions. While a minority within the PA made efforts to support the resistance or at least turn a blind eye to it, the majority adhered to the path and purpose for which the Authority was established and designed.

Many leaders within these institutions, particularly in the security apparatus, maintained direct contact with Israeli officials. Some aspired to position themselves as the next president of Palestine, aligning with Western plans to replace Arafat. As a result, the PA—especially its security agencies—worked systematically to track, arrest, and interrogate resistance fighters, often resorting to torture to extract information about their networks and cells. Many resistance members died under torture, and crucial intelligence was passed on to Israeli forces, enabling the targeted assassinations of numerous political and military leaders within the resistance.

In some cases, these security agencies arrested resistance members only to hand them over to Israel, or they vacated their headquarters, allowing Israeli forces to take custody of the detainees. They also foiled significant resistance operations against

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There is little difference in the policies of the two major parties regarding Israel and the Palestinian issue.

Israel and succeeded in dismantling critical components and infrastructure of the resistance, forcing it to rebuild from scratch in several areas.

The actions of the PA and its security apparatuses became a profound and unprecedented calamity for the Palestinian people, imposing an immense burden on their struggle for liberation and self-determination.

Arafat swiftly abandoned his initial strategy of turning a blind eye to the resistance, which he had hoped to use as leverage to secure better terms in negotiations. Instead, he found himself increasingly threatened—personally, politically, and in terms of his leadership. In a bid to safeguard his position, Arafat doubled down on his commitment to the peace process, vehemently condemning resistance operations in the strongest terms. He even boasted about his security apparatus's success in thwarting hundreds of attacks against Israel, arresting resistance leaders and operatives, and providing critical intelligence to Israeli authorities.

Despite these efforts, Arafat's overtures failed to protect him. Sharon imposed a suffocating siege on Arafat's presidential compound in Ramallah, with Israeli forces storming the city and partially demolishing his headquarters. It became clear that Arafat was no longer seen as a viable partner,[1] and the search began for a new Palestinian leader—someone willing to pick up negotiations and concessions where Arafat left off. Mahmoud Abbas emerged as the favored candidate and faced heavy international pressure to accept the role of prime minister with expanded powers.

Initially, Arafat resisted appointing a prime minister who would rival his authority and, effectively, act as the de facto leader. However, the looming threat of assassination forced his hand, and

[1] Despite Arafat's numerous concessions and betrayals, American decision-makers consistently portray him with disdain and contempt in their memoirs. This reflects not only their alignment with Zionist interests but also an acute= =awareness of Arafat's political and moral decline. Examples of this can be found in George Tenet's *At the Center of the Storm* (p. 103), Condoleezza Rice's *No Higher Honor* (p. 177), and Hillary Clinton's *Hard Choices* (p. 306).

he reluctantly appointed Mahmoud Abbas on April 29, 2003. Internal power struggles quickly ensued between the two over authority and influence, prompting Abbas to resign in less than five months. In response, Arafat appointed Ahmed Qurei as prime minister on October 5, 2003, viewing him as more aligned with his vision than Abbas, who was favored by Israel. Sharon, however, dealt a final blow by orchestrating Arafat's assassination in November 2004, reportedly via a slow-acting poison administered by someone within his inner circle. This outcome was facilitated by a governing authority fundamentally designed to operate under Israeli dominance.

Following Arafat's death, Mahmoud Abbas returned to lead the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization, backed by robust support from both Israel and the United States.

In January 2005, a carefully orchestrated presidential election took place with the unmistakable objective of installing Mahmoud Abbas as the head of the Palestinian Authority. Seven candidates participated, none of whom had meaningful public support or the resources to pose a serious challenge to Abbas, the favored heir of the PA and a prominent collaborator with the Israeli occupation. As expected, the election culminated in Abbas's victory, securing his position as the president of the Palestinian Authority.

Arafat's assassination marked the conclusion of a series of targeted killings of Palestinian leaders. Sharon widened the scope of these assassinations by targeting political leaders of Palestinian factions, a significant escalation from the prior focus on military commanders. The Palestinian people paid a heavy price, losing many of their finest military and political leaders during the Intifada. Among the most prominent military leaders assassinated were Mahmoud Abu al-Hanoud, commander of the Al-Qassam Brigades in the West Bank, in November 2001, and Salah Shehadeh, the general commander of the Al-Qassam Brigades, in July 2002. Key political leaders martyred included Abu Ali Mustafa, the Secretary-General of the Popular Front, in August 2001, and

Hamas figures such as Jamal Mansour and Jamal Salim in July 2001, Ismail Abu Shanab in July 2002, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the founder of Hamas, in March 2004, and his deputy and successor, Dr. Abdul Aziz al-Rantisi, in April 2004. Additionally, figures such as Abdullah Barghouti, nicknamed "the Prince of Shadows," were arrested, with Barghouti apprehended in March 2003.

Despite these profound losses, the resistance showed extraordinary resilience, replenishing its ranks and continuing the fight. It developed innovative security and military strategies that continually frustrated Israeli forces. Even with heightened security measures, resistance fighters consistently breached defenses to carry out martyrdom operations deep within Israeli territory. These operations included the participation of women[1] and amounted to 135 missions between 2000 and 2005, with Hamas accounting for 61 of these attacks.[2]

The resistance also succeeded in advancing its weaponry, starting with the production of locally made rockets. These rockets initially had a range of 10 km, later extending to 12 km, using locally sourced components within the Palestinian environment. This represented a significant escalation in the threat to the security of Israeli settlements.

During the five years of the Intifada, the Israeli army recorded over 22,000 attacks, shootings, and rocket launches,[3] including high-profile operations such as the assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi by the Popular Front on October 17, 2001.

Both Gaza and the West Bank provided distinct advantages for the resistance struggle. Gaza was distinguished by its high population density, primarily due to the numerous refugee camps. It was also characterized by the strength of the Islamic movement,

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[1] The vanguard of female Palestinian martyrs during the Second Intifada came from various factions, including Wafa Idris, Ayat al-Akhras, Dareen Abu Aisheh, Hanadi Jaradat, Reem al-Riyashi, and others.
[2] Mushin Saleh, p.128.
[3] Ibid.

which operated actively within this dense population, particularly in the camps. In contrast, the West Bank featured rugged terrain, filled with caves and cliffs, as well as numerous mountainous paths that enabled the resistance fighters to infiltrate Israel, despite the extensive security checkpoints on the main roads.

As a result, operations in Gaza were notable for their frequency, diversity, and the difficulty in tracking and apprehending the perpetrators among the large, dense population. The Israeli military also faced significant challenges in launching large-scale incursions into Gaza. On the other hand, operations in the West Bank were more focused and impactful, particularly due to the proximity to key Israeli centers in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, as well as the difficulty of controlling the narrow, mountainous paths.

The Intifada and martyrdom operations succeeded in destabilizing Israel's security doctrine, leading to a rise in emigration and causing significant economic damage. Faced with mounting losses, Sharon realized that the only way to halt the downward spiral was to make two crucial decisions—decisions that no Israeli Prime Minister could have taken without the power and long military history that Sharon commanded. These decisions were the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the construction of the separation wall in the West Bank.

Sharon's goal with the separation wall was to close off all potential entry points for suicide bombers. His rationale for withdrawing from Gaza was to distance Israelis from the threat, leaving Israel to blockade Gaza externally while Palestinian security forces took control from within, thus igniting an internal struggle among the Palestinians.

For many Israelis, the withdrawal from Gaza and the erection of a separation barrier across vast areas of the West Bank were unthinkable. These actions were seen as a breach of deeply ingrained taboos—an admission of Israel's defeat by Palestinian resistance, despite the disparity in military strength. The moves also risked setting a precedent for further withdrawals from the West

Bank, potentially dismantling settlements established since 1967. Yet, Sharon pressed ahead with his plan, crushing any internal opposition within Israel.

In the medium term, these measures successfully curbed the martyrdom operations, forcing the Palestinian resistance to explore new tactics. However, Sharon failed to foresee that a liberated Gaza would evolve into a resilient stronghold of resistance, a launching pad for an intensive rocket campaign, and a major military base—fundamentally altering the balance of power.

The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza was the most significant outcome of this courageous Intifada, during which over 4,000 Palestinians were martyred across its five years (2000-2005), including nearly 800 children and around 300 women. More than 45,000 were injured, approximately 10,000 Palestinians were arrested, and over 70,000 homes were destroyed.[1] In comparison, Israel suffered more than 1,500 casualties and over 3,000 injuries. Economically, 2002 was the worst year in Israeli history, with losses totaling eight billion dollars in the first two years of the Intifada, averaging 11 million dollars per day. In addition, Israelis endured a profound psychological shock, losing confidence in the security, prosperity, and well-being they had been promised to encourage immigration. Since that time, reverse migration has gradually increased.[2]

While these numbers might initially suggest a defeat for the Palestinian people and a victory for the Israelis, a closer look reveals a different story. When considered in the context of the deteriorating balance of power, it becomes evident that the Palestinian people demonstrated remarkable resilience, determination, and courage.

Furthermore, when we consider the significant moral shifts, the picture becomes even clearer. One of the most notable of these moral shifts came from Tzipi Livni, a staunchly Zionist and

[1] Muhsin Saleh, pp.126, 128.
[2] Ibid., pp.129-30.

nationalist figure, who acknowledged that the concept of Greater Israel was over. She recognized that Israelis could no longer continue to dominate the Palestinians without making painful concessions.[1]

[1] Condoleezza Rice, p.328.

The Liberation of the Gaza Strip

One of the key differences between the resistance movements in the West Bank and Gaza is that the Islamists in the West Bank lived under Jordanian rule until 1967, a regime that typically relied on a strategy of containment and soft control. In contrast, their counterparts in Gaza were subjected to the harsh and repressive Egyptian regime, which had a profound influence on the development of the Islamic movement and shaped its approach to recruitment and activism.

Furthermore, Gaza's geography—its relatively flat terrain and small size—made it a natural refuge for many displaced people, resulting in a densely packed population. This created a socially tight-knit, yet non-modern structure, with close-knit communities, narrow streets, and a maze of alleys and pathways. These conditions made Gaza particularly resistant to the surveillance and control measures employed by modern authorities.

These factors, along with others, allowed the Islamists in Gaza to grow in strength compared to their counterparts in the West Bank, becoming a significant challenge to their Israeli occupiers. It is even said that Yitzhak Rabin once wished to wake up and find Gaza swallowed by the sea. This region became one of the most complicated issues in Israeli security strategy, and it was one of the first matters they sought to pass to Arafat's authority. Ultimately, however, it was Sharon who withdrew from Gaza.

Internally, the Islamists in Gaza were bolder, more proactive, and more willing to take initiative than their peers. From the very beginning of the Palestinian Authority's establishment, they recognized the importance of participating in the 1996 elections, unlike their counterparts in the West Bank and abroad.[1] It was

[1] Ibrahim Gosheh, p.225.

from Gaza that the first Intifada began, from Gaza that armed resistance first emerged, and from Gaza that some of the most influential leaders of the Palestinian resistance emerged.

Israeli Withdrawal from Gaza

The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza was scheduled for 2005. In response, the Palestinian Authority declared its readiness and capability to govern the territory, while the resistance factions signaled their willingness to take control, aiming to eliminate any excuses that could undermine the withdrawal and hope for future reconciliation with the Authority.

Mohammad Dahlan, head of the Preventive Security Service in Gaza, was seen by the Israelis as their primary hope for maintaining security in the sector. Dahlan was one of the most loyal collaborators with Israel, renowned for his relentless efforts to track, arrest, and torture resistance members. He was also seen as a potential successor to Yasser Arafat, with aspirations to become president of the Palestinian Authority. However, the presence of older figures like Mahmoud Abbas thwarted his ambitions, as Dahlan was considered too young to gain acceptance within the established leadership.

Though he lost the chance to lead the Authority, Gaza presented Dahlan with a unique opportunity to prove his worth or even seek independence for the region. This set the stage for escalating tensions between him and Abbas. Sharon's strategy to support Dahlan's control over Gaza included the assassination of key resistance leaders, such as Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdul Aziz al-Rantisi.

While the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza was a significant achievement for the Palestinian resistance—demonstrating its ability to accomplish what Arab armies had failed to do—it also marked a perilous shift in the situation. Two main issues emerged from this development: First, the Palestinian Authority, led by Dahlan and Abbas, and its security forces filled with collaborators began a series of harsh campaigns against the resistance factions,

under the banner that "legitimate weapons belong to the Palestinian Authority." Second, the daunting challenge of governing the densely populated Gaza Strip, which lacked economic resources, geographic depth, and political backing, made effective administration increasingly difficult.

The practical and realistic resolution to these challenges unfolded through a series of developments, all of which occurred outside Gaza:

The September 11, 2001 attacks delivered an unprecedented shock to the United States, one not experienced since World War II. In the aftermath, a new idea began circulating within American political circles: the necessity of democratizing the Islamic world. While this concept had long existed in academic, orientalism, and security discussions, it had not appealed to policymakers. As long as Arab dictators upheld American and Israeli interests, there was little incentive to replace them or promote democracy in their countries, given the risks and uncertainties such a shift might entail.

However, the aftermath of September 11 revealed a harsh reality: these Arab autocrats were fostering explosive levels of anger and resentment. These ticking time bombs were no longer confined to the Arab and Islamic worlds but had begun to detonate in the very heart of America and Europe. Against this backdrop, two models in the Islamic world—Türkiye and Pakistan—became particularly attractive to American strategists.

In both Türkiye and Pakistan, democratic processes allowed governing parties to change, but the core of the state's power—embodied in the military—remained firmly aligned with American interests. The military in these nations could intervene or stage coups whenever democracy produced outcomes unfavorable to them or to the United States. For instance, Türkiye earned a

reputation for experiencing a military coup roughly every decade,[1] while Pakistan averaged one coup every eight years.[2]

The primary advantage of these models was their ability to absorb the energy of Islamist movements, redirecting them into political engagement rather than militant resistance. This prevented the rise of jihadist movements, as the prospect of political change offered a plausible, achievable, and less costly alternative to armed struggle.

Consequently, American policy shifted toward "spreading democracy" in the Arab world—not out of a genuine commitment to democratic principles or concern for Arab populations, but as a strategic move to divert Islamist energy away from jihadist paths that could lead to future attacks like those of September 11. Palestine was identified as a testing ground for this experiment, particularly since the Israelis saw an opportunity to align this brand of democracy with their own strategic interests.

Yasser Arafat served as the leader of the Palestinian Authority, representing the Palestinian people without their direct choice or an electoral mandate. His rise to prominence began as the leader of the Fatah movement, which, upon joining the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)—originally established with the backing of the Egyptian Nasserist regime—quickly assumed control of the organization. Arafat subsequently became its chairman. The PLO's role as the representative of the Palestinian people was not a decision made by the Palestinians themselves but rather the result of a resolution by the Arab states. Following the Intifada, Arafat was elevated to lead the Palestinian cause, once again without the legitimacy of an election.

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[1] Military coups occurred in Türkiye in the years 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997, the latter being known as a "soft coup" against the government of the Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan.

[2] In Pakistan, military coups took place in 1958, 1971, 1977, 1998, and 1999. Additionally, there was the assassination of General Zia-ul-Haq in 1988, who was opposed to American interests.

While these unique circumstances allowed Arafat to ascend to leadership without electoral validation, they did not provide the same pathway for his successors, particularly Mahmoud Abbas. Abbas lacked a notable history of resistance, was not an eloquent speaker, and carried a controversial reputation as the architect of the Oslo Accords. Consequently, a need arose for American and Israeli-backed elections in Palestine to bestow legitimacy upon Abbas as president of the Palestinian Authority. This legitimacy was vital for enabling him to make the concessions expected of him on critical issues such as Jerusalem, refugees, and settlements.[1] Additionally, it was intended to empower him to lead a decisive campaign against resistance factions, leveraging his status as the legitimately elected president in a "free and fair" election, supported by a Fatah majority in the Legislative Council—essentially the Palestinian parliament.

At this juncture, Palestinian resistance factions were struck with alarm, realizing that the resolution and potential closure of the Palestinian cause could be rapidly advanced through the upcoming elections. Compounding this crisis was the fact that these factions had structured themselves and their operations around their identity as resistance movements, not as political parties designed to contest elections. From their inception, it had neither been imagined nor anticipated that Israel would ever permit elections for the Palestinian people. This unprecedented situation posed a substantial challenge, leading to a significant division between the two major Islamic resistance factions: Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Hamas decided to participate in the elections, aiming to exert every effort to obstruct the liquidation of the Palestinian cause and to prevent Fatah, which already held a monopoly on power, from making critical decisions and unilaterally shaping the fate of the

[1] Mahmoud Abbas did not shy away from condemning the resistance, nor did he hesitate to declare that the return of refugees was not a realistic solution—even though Abbas himself comes from a refugee family originally from the occupied city of Safed. In doing so, he became the first to relinquish his own right and the rights of the entire Palestinian people.

cause. Conversely, Islamic Jihad chose to boycott the elections, maintaining that elections could not provide legitimacy for concessions on historical rights and emphasizing that the resistance movement must remain firmly committed to military and field resistance, regardless of the Authority's decisions.

From the perspective of the Americans, Israelis, Arab regimes, and even Fatah, Hamas's participation in the elections posed no genuine threat. Fatah's victory seemed assured, given its longstanding control over the Palestinian Authority, its financial resources, and its 13-year dominance over the administrative machinery. Resistance movements, despite their popularity, lacked the experienced cadres necessary for governance and administration, had no prior involvement in political operations, and (particularly among local candidates contesting the elections) lacked international relations. Additionally, as Islamic movements, they faced inherent rejection from the regional Arab environment, which further diminished their prospects.

The elections were held with great care to ensure their transparency, leaving no room for doubts about the legitimacy of Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority government. Yet the results were nothing short of a seismic shock: Hamas emerged victorious with an overwhelming majority, securing 74 out of 132 seats and achieving the ability to form a government independently. This outcome, unforeseen by all—including Hamas itself—redefined the political landscape. Hamas had initially aimed to serve as a powerful opposition capable of thwarting any concessions on Palestinian rights, not to assume governance. Meanwhile, Fatah managed to win only 45 seats.

The election results reverberated across Palestine, the Arab world, and Western nations. The democratic process had elevated Hamas, a group classified by many as a terrorist organization, to power. This development placed the international community in a bind. Recognizing the elections' legitimacy would require respecting the will of the Palestinian people, while rejecting the

results would expose the hypocrisy of their democratic rhetoric.[1] However, opponents of the election's outcome found a path forward: they acknowledged the fairness of the process but refused to accept its results, launching efforts to obstruct and ultimately nullify the election's impact.

The Military Resolution in Gaza

The most profound consequence of these elections was the dismantling of the plan to resolve the Palestinian issue through a Fatah-dominated government. The prospect of installing a Palestinian president with full legitimacy to surrender claims over historic Palestine and compromise on critical matters—such as Jerusalem, refugees, statehood, water rights, and settlements—was effectively thwarted. This represented a monumental victory and a retreat from a perilous threat.

However, this achievement also introduced new and complex challenges for the resistance movement, now tasked with governing a besieged and suffocated population under relentless external pressures. Managing the affairs of any society is inherently challenging, but for the Palestinian community under such exceptional constraints, it proved an unparalleled ordeal of political, administrative, and humanitarian struggle.

Hamas sought to establish a national unity government involving all the Palestinian factions to share the responsibility of governance and alleviate the impending wave of hostility from the Palestinian Authority, Arab regimes, and Western nations. However, this effort was thwarted when threats were made against any faction willing to join Hamas's government. Consequently, Hamas had no choice but to govern alone, with Ismail Haniyeh appointed as Prime Minister. Mahmoud al-Zaharas Foreign Minister, and Saeed Siyam as Interior Minister, the last two both being prominent figures within Hamas.

A coordinated campaign of opposition was launched, spearheaded by the Palestinian Authority and Fatah. One of the

[1] See Condoleezza Rice, pp.476-77.

initial moves by Mahmoud Abbas was to convene a session of the outgoing legislative council to enact constitutional amendments that stripped the government of its powers and concentrated them in the hands of the president. Abbas issued additional decrees restructuring ministries and agencies, transferring key responsibilities—such as security forces, media oversight, border management, and embassy operations—directly to himself.

The most damaging blow, however, came from within the Palestinian Authority's internal systems. Hamas ministers found their ministries empty, devoid of funds or resources. The administrative infrastructure was entirely dominated by Fatah members who actively obstructed ministerial directives, including those issued by Interior Minister Saeed Siyam. Siyam faced immense resistance, particularly from his deputy, Rashid Abu Shbak, who had been appointed by Abbas to oversee all security forces. The lack of cooperation bred widespread security chaos, further exacerbated by Fatah elements instigating disorder on the streets and security personnel refusing to fulfill their roles.

To regain control, Saeed Siyam established an "Executive Force," composed of members from various factions and directly accountable to him. This force, led by Jamal Abu Samhadana, founder of the Popular Resistance Committees, was pivotal in restoring order. However, Abu Samhadana's leadership was short-lived, as he was assassinated in an Israeli airstrike in June 2006.

This was not the only effort to hinder and obstruct the new government. Israeli forces in the West Bank launched a campaign of arrests targeting Palestinian lawmakers who had won seats in the elections, particularly those affiliated with Hamas, to diminish their numbers. The goal was either to ensure Fatah maintained a majority in the Legislative Council or to prevent a quorum from being reached if Fatah members chose to abstain, thus rendering the council nonfunctional.

Arab and Western governments also suspended financial aid to the Palestinian Authority, which accounted for over half of its budget. Furthermore, Israel withheld tax revenues collected from

Palestinians, representing about one-third of the budget. The international community, through the "Quartet"—the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations—imposed conditions on any dealings with Hamas. These included demands for Hamas to recognize Israel, renounce terrorism, cease resistance activities, and endorse all agreements previously signed by the PLO.

At the same time, the security chaos orchestrated by Fatah elements intensified. Protests erupted over unpaid salaries, leading to sit-ins, strikes, and demonstrations, which escalated into violent confrontations and killings. Palestinian Authority security forces became increasingly involved in the turmoil, exacerbating the situation. Ministers and leaders of Hamas were targeted for assassination, including high-profile figures from both the political and military branches. For example, Abdul Karim al-Qouqa was killed on March 31, 2006, Muhammad al-Tatar on May 16, 2006, and Hussein al-Aouja on July 6, 2006. Fatah militants resorted to brutal tactics, such as shooting Hamas youth in the feet and leaving them to bleed to death, blocking ambulance access, or throwing them from tall buildings. Despite the mounting violence, Hamas struggled to maintain restraint, deeply concerned about the possibility of internal conflict or civil war.

Numerous attempts at reconciliation were made. In June 2006, Palestinians in Israeli prisons proposed a document aimed at creating a consensus framework for both factions. Several meetings followed, held in Cairo and Mecca, culminating in the Mecca Agreement on February 7, 2007. Despite these efforts, all attempts ultimately failed, as neither Fatah nor Israel was willing to accept a resolution that would allow Hamas to govern effectively. By the end of that turbulent year, the security chaos had claimed approximately 700 lives and left over 3,000 injured. Abbas repeatedly announced his intention to hold early elections, treating the political process as if it were subject to his unilateral decisions.[1]

[1] See a detailed analysis of these developments in *Ahmad Saeed Nofal and Mohsen Saleh's* chapter, "*Hamas's Position on the Palestine Liberation Organization and Its=*

This grueling year of tension made reconciliation seem increasingly unattainable. The Palestinian Authority's institutions refused to relinquish control or acknowledge Hamas's governance. Abbas established a special force known as the Presidential Guard, which received over $80 million in U.S. support and was trained under the supervision of a military advisor.[1] Abbas also appointed Mohammed Dahlan, a fierce opponent of Hamas, as an advisor on security affairs, effectively granting him the authority of an Interior Minister. Dahlan systematically undermined the independent Interior Minister Hani al-Qawasmi, eventually driving him to resign.

The security situation continued to deteriorate, marked by an increase in security checkpoints and a surge in assassinations. In one particularly grim week, 22 Hamas members were killed. Between early 2006 and mid-2007, Hamas documented the deaths of 76 of its members and affiliates at the hands of Fatah-affiliated security forces. Additionally, 462 violent incidents were recorded in the four months following the signing of the Mecca Agreement.

At this juncture, the Qassam Brigades made the decisive move to end the abnormal situation, acting independently from Hamas's political bureau. They launched a swift and targeted attack on the main headquarters of Mohammed Dahlan's Preventive Security Force in Tel al-Hawa, regarded as the "nerve center" of

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=*Factions*," in *Mohsen Saleh (ed.): The Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas: Studies in Thought and Experience,* 2nd Edition, Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center, 2015, p. 144 and onwards.

[1] The United States provided trainers for the Palestinian Presidential Guard as part of efforts to strengthen Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) following Hamas's 2006 electoral victory. This initiative included collaboration with Jordan, where the training occurred, and was supported by the U.S. Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The trainers included American security experts and personnel working under the U.S. State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Bureau (INL). This program, aimed at building a capable and professional security force, focused on VIP protection and counterterrorism. While it sought to stabilize PA governance, it also contributed to tensions between Fatah and Hamas, especially during factional clashes.
See: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pcaab579.pdf (CRS-4), and,
https://2001-2009.state.gov/documents/organization/113300.pdf

opposition. Within mere hours, the stronghold crumbled, leaving its personnel scattered—either fleeing, displaced, or in hiding.

This military resolution stands as one of the most pivotal moments in Palestinian history, heralding what many see as the true liberation of Gaza. Since then, Gaza has remained the sole genuinely liberated territory in Palestine and, arguably, the only fully emancipated area in the Arab world.

In retaliation, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Fatah forces in the West Bank unleashed a violent crackdown on Hamas and its institutions. Mahmoud Abbas dismissed Ismail Haniyeh's government and unilaterally installed a new administration headed by Salam Fayyad—an individual criticized for strong ties to Israeli and American interests—without elections, referendum, or legislative approval, in blatant violation of constitutional norms. This development marked the beginning of what became known as the Palestinian division: Hamas took control of the liberated Gaza Strip, while the PA, under Fatah, maintained its grip on the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Abbas's administration in the West Bank resumed negotiations and security coordination with Israel, escalating its suppression of religious activities, charitable organizations, and social initiatives under the guise of combating Hamas. This period saw an unprecedented level of collaboration with Israel to dismantle resistance networks, arrest activists, share intelligence, and conduct joint interrogations. For Palestinians in the West Bank, this ushered in an exceptionally harsh and oppressive era.[1]

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[1] Refer to the following works for insights on the Palestinian Authority's policies in the West Bank:
Hamas Media Office, *The Black Book: A Fact-Finding and Documentation of the Practices of the "Dayton Authority" and the Violations of Its Security Apparatus in the West Bank (6/14/2007–6/15/2008)*, 1st Edition. Gaza: Electronic Version, 2008.
Mohsen Saleh (Editor), *Clash of Wills: The Security Conduct of Fatah, Hamas, and Other Concerned Parties (2006–2007)*, 1st Edition. Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre, 2008.
Esraa Lafi, *Policies to Combat Resistance: Hamas in the West Bank as a Case Study*, Egyptian Institute for Studies, March 16, 2018.

In an unusual and unprecedented move, Fatah decided to withhold salaries from public sector employees in the Gaza Strip unless they refrained from reporting to work. The rationale was that by attending their jobs, employees would be helping Hamas govern Gaza, and thus their salaries would be cut. This "forced strike" severely hindered Hamas's ability to manage the sector while simultaneously purging administrative positions of Fatah loyalists, leaving only those loyal to Hamas or those who opposed the coercion.

Arab regimes also took steps against Hamas. Egypt completely closed the Rafah crossing and imposed a full siege on Gaza. Saudi Arabia prevented Gazans from performing the Hajj pilgrimage in the first year following Hamas's military takeover. Meanwhile, Arab and Western governments resumed financial support for Salam Fayyad's government, providing grants and aid to strengthen Abbas's administration and fund efforts against resistance in the West Bank.

Israel escalated its attacks on Gaza, shocked by Hamas's unexpected military takeover after Israel's withdrawal. Few had anticipated that the Israeli retreat from Gaza would result in Hamas's control, backed by the legitimacy of an overwhelming electoral victory. This marked the first time since the British occupation that Palestinians governed a piece of land, with leaders from the resistance rather than from those who compromised principles and abandoned rights.

Abbas sought to regain control of the Gaza Strip, advocating for the deployment of international forces to occupy the area. However, this proposal was rejected due to two primary challenges: the complexities surrounding the authority and operations of such forces under the oversight of the Egyptian and Israeli governments, and the prevailing assumption that the stringent blockade on Gaza would ultimately force Hamas to surrender and collapse. This anticipated scenario never materialized.

Although Hamas withstood the siege, both the movement and the people of Gaza faced extreme hardship under the blockade. The economic, health, and educational sectors rapidly deteriorated, various development projects collapsed, and social conditions worsened significantly. Poverty and unemployment rates skyrocketed, water shortages became critical, and diseases proliferated due to the lack of medicines and restrictions on importing medical equipment. Gaza effectively turned into the world's largest open-air prison.

The Five Wars in Gaza

Since Hamas's military consolidation, Gaza transformed into a liberated Palestinian territory governed by an administration supporting resistance rather than suppressing it. This shift presented a serious threat to its adversaries. Despite facing significant challenges, such as ensuring the delivery of salaries and goods, resistance operations thrived and developed, marking a new phase of resilience and strategic growth.

Hamas initiated efforts to dismantle Israeli espionage networks within Gaza using a range of methods. These included offering amnesty and protection to collaborators who repented, prosecuting and executing others, and occasionally reemploying informants to mislead Israeli intelligence. The organization facilitated the resistance's growth by enhancing its operational capabilities, fostering inter-factional cooperation, and establishing joint operations rooms and coordination committees. These measures ensured unified decision-making while balancing the authority's governance responsibilities and military engagement with Israel.

Balancing governance and resistance posed significant challenges for Hamas, requiring it to manage Gaza's political, security, and daily affairs while focusing on developing its military capabilities. This was particularly challenging due to Gaza's geographical isolation and the stringent Egyptian blockade, often more severe than Israel's restrictions.

Since consolidating military control, Gaza has experienced four major wars with Israel: the first from late 2008 to early 2009, the second in 2012, the third in 2014, and the fourth in 2021. There were also intermittent skirmishes and escalations between these conflicts.

Israel consistently aimed to eliminate Hamas or dislodge it from power in Gaza during these wars but failed each time. On the contrary, every conflict revealed notable advancements in the resistance's weaponry and technical expertise. Hamas's primary condition to cease hostilities was the lifting of the blockade, including establishing and operating a Gaza seaport. However, this demand remains unmet.

A fifth conflict predating Hamas's military consolidation in Gaza was the war in 2006, which served as a powerful testament to the movement's unwavering commitment to resistance—even after entering elections and forming a government. This stood in stark contrast to Fatah's trajectory, which had abandoned its principles, embraced collaboration, and become a tool for Israeli interests.

In June 2006, the resistance executed a daring military operation that resulted in the capture of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. This bold move triggered an intense Israeli offensive aimed at retrieving Shalit, dismantling the rocket-launching infrastructure targeting southern Israeli settlements, and destroying Gaza's tunnel networks. Despite these objectives, Israel failed to achieve its goals, and the conflict concluded with a ceasefire in November 2006.

When viewed collectively, these wars disproportionately impacted Palestinians in terms of casualties and destruction. On the surface, the immense material damage might appear as repeated defeats. However, this narrative neglects the significant imbalance in power and the two sides' differing objectives. For resistance, survival, inflicting damage on the enemy, and thwarting its aims under severe military and political constraints represented extraordinary achievements.

Egypt's role as a mediator and adversary also shaped Gaza's struggles. The Egyptian regime, one of the resistance's most formidable foes, enforced a stringent blockade on Gaza. The closure of the Rafah crossing, the sole gateway for goods and individuals, intensified the humanitarian crisis. Critical supplies, including fuel for electricity and medical equipment, were severely restricted. As a result, Gaza's population endured unimaginable hardships: hospitals were closed due to power outages and shortages of medicine, surgeries were suspended, and many patients died while awaiting permission to seek treatment abroad.

The people of Gaza, with the support of their government, turned to constructing tunnels between the Palestinian and Egyptian sides of Rafah (originally one city before being divided by a British-drawn border). These tunnels became the enclave's sole lifeline, facilitating the transport of goods and vital supplies. Despite expectations to stand in solidarity with Palestinians, the Egyptian regime adopted a stance of "neutral mediation" that in practice heavily favored Israel and exerted immense pressure on the resistance.

In the aftermath of Hamas's military consolidation, Egypt launched an unprecedented campaign against the movement and its allies. Egyptian intelligence arrested several Hamas members passing through Egypt, subjecting some to brutal torture, leading to fatalities. Among those killed was Yusuf Abu Zuhri, the brother of Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri. Another was Ayman Nofal, a senior commander in the al-Qassam Brigades, who endured severe torture until escaping during the 2011 Egyptian revolution.

While acting as a mediator for a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel—predicated on lifting Gaza's blockade—Egypt failed to enforce Israel's compliance. When Israel reneged on its commitments, resistance factions refused to renew the ceasefire. Amid negotiations, Israel launched a surprise offensive on December 27, 2008, striking a graduation ceremony of Palestinian police cadets and killing over 100 individuals. The attack came just

a day after a meeting between Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, raising serious questions about Egypt's role.

The ensuing war, lasting 21 days, devastated Gaza. Over 1,300 Palestinians were killed, including more than 400 children and 100 women, and more than 5,000 were injured. By contrast, Israel reported nine fatalities, though resistance factions estimated that approximately 80 Israeli soldiers were killed.[1]

The most significant outcome of this war was Israel's inability to reoccupy the Gaza Strip. Facing unexpected and fierce resistance, they were forced to withdraw unconditionally, reverting to their blockade strategy. Similarly, their attempts to overthrow the Hamas government failed, solidifying Gaza's role as a steadfast territory confronting a vastly superior Israeli military force.

Amid the conflict, the Emir of Qatar attempted to convene an Arab summit to address Gaza's plight. However, the Egyptian regime exerted significant efforts to obstruct the summit, ultimately reducing it to a private meeting rather than an emergency Arab summit.[2] Notably, Mahmoud Abbas refused to attend, citing objections to the presence of Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal. Abbas viewed Meshaal's participation as a challenge to his claim of being the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people,a claim that had been his central preoccupation since Hamas's military consolidation.

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[1] Muhsin Saleh, pp.132-33.

[2] The Egyptian regime regards the Palestinian issue as a strategic asset that must remain exclusively under its control, viewing it to amplify its significance in the eyes of the United States. To preserve this monopoly, Egypt actively opposes the involvement of other nations or mediators. However, its unwavering pro-Israel stance and increasing internal vulnerabilities have gradually allowed Qatar and Türkiye to emerge as influential players in mediating the Palestinian cause. Despite these developments, Egypt's geographical advantage, particularly its authority over the Rafah crossing, continues to solidify its dominant role in managing the Palestinian issue. This leverage ensures that Cairo remains a critical actor, capable of asserting its influence even as other regional players seek to establish themselves as mediators.

The most alarming revelation of this war was the extent to which the Palestinian Authority and the Egyptian regime opposed the Islamic resistance, particularly Hamas. This hostility underscored the challenges Hamas faced not only from external enemies but also from regional actors.

The Palestinian Authority's controversial actions came under scrutiny during the Goldstone Report scandal. Richard Goldstone, a South African jurist, prepared a report documenting human rights violations in Israel's war on Gaza. Surprisingly, the Palestinian Authority opposed the report. It later emerged that Israel had threatened to release a video of Mahmoud Abbas in a meeting with Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, during which Abbas purportedly urged Israel to continue its military campaign against Gaza to oust Hamas.

Further evidence of the PA's actions surfaced through a leaked phone conversation between Tayyib Abdul Rahim, Secretary-General of the Palestinian Presidency, and Dov Weissglas, Chief of Staff to the Israeli Prime Minister. In the call, Abdul Rahim reportedly encouraged the Israeli military to storm Gaza's Jabalia and Shati refugee camps, dismissing the potential loss of civilian life by stating that they all voted for Hamas, so they chose their fate.

The Egyptian regime also played a contentious role during the war. Media campaigns against Hamas were coupled with covert operations. Observers suggest that Omar Suleiman, Egypt's intelligence chief, sought to position himself as a successor to President Hosni Mubarak, over 80-years old at the time, by demonstrating loyalty to Israeli and American interests.[1] Suleiman obstructed prisoner exchange negotiations between Hamas and

[1] Several members of Hamas's political bureau shared during conferences in Istanbul that Omar Suleiman, Egypt's former intelligence chief, exhibited a somewhat balanced stance toward Hamas until 2005, after which his position shifted. Sheikh Rifai Taha, a leader of the Islamic Group, recounted a 2003 meeting where Suleiman sought to gauge the views of Islamist factions regarding his potential candidacy for the presidency. By 2005, campaigns promoting Suleiman as a presidential candidate began appearing on Cairo's streets.

Israel, prioritizing efforts to locate captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. His actions aimed to strip Hamas of a major bargaining tool for the release of Palestinian prisoners. Moreover, Suleiman imposed harsher terms than Israel itself demanded, delaying the exchange despite interventions by international mediators, including France and Germany.

Relief swept across the region when the Egyptian revolution erupted in January 2011, bringing an end to Hosni Mubarak's rule along with that of Omar Suleiman, who had been appointed vice president during the final days of the regime. The entire Arab world was shaken by this monumental upheaval, and Israel perceived an existential threat with Mubarak's ouster. Israeli minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer famously described Mubarak as "a strategic treasure for Israel,"[1] while former CIA director George Tenet hailed him as "one of the most reliable partners in combating terrorism and pursuing peace in the Middle East."[2] In the American security lexicon, however, "terrorism" often translates to Islam, while "pursuing peace" is synonymous with empowering Israel.

The turbulence deepened with another seismic event: the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in March 2011. This uprising posed a serious threat to the Assad regime, which had maintained the security of the Golan Heights for four decades. Crucially, the fall of the Mubarak regime removed a significant obstacle, paving the way for Hamas to negotiate a landmark deal in October 2011. This agreement secured the release of an Israeli soldier held captive by Hamas in exchange for one thousand Palestinian prisoners, including twenty women.

With the rise of the Arab revolutions, the dream of liberating Palestine seemed closer than ever. These aspirations reached their zenith when the Muslim Brotherhood triumphed in Egypt's presidential elections, bringing Mohamed Morsi to power. It felt as if history had accelerated and distant dreams were suddenly within

[1] A statement to Israeli Military Radio dated May 5, 2010.
[2] George Tenet, p.103.

reach, symbolized by the warm reception of Hamas leaders at the Egyptian presidential palace.

Morsi, who assumed the presidency in July 2012, struggled to consolidate his authority over a deeply entrenched state apparatus, one historically rooted in hostility toward Islam and Muslims and dedicated to suppressing Islamists. He faced significant challenges in navigating the complex dynamics of governance and was cautious about engaging in conflicts with the United States or Israel. The Muslim Brotherhood's strategy prioritized reassuring international powers and pursuing gradual reforms.

Despite these limitations, many restrictions on Palestinians were eased during Morsi's presidency, particularly regarding movement through the Rafah border crossing, the only lifeline for the besieged Gaza Strip. While the crossing remained under the control of the same security apparatus, which had prohibited the transfer of weapons or materials that could aid in their manufacture, Morsi's single year in office became a golden era for Gaza. During this time, Hamas managed to smuggle large quantities of weapons, benefiting from weakened Egyptian security forces in the wake of the revolution and the perception that an Islamist-led era was imminent. Key supplies also flowed from Libyan stockpiles after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi.

This pivotal year saw Israel assassinate Ahmed Jabari, the deputy leader of the Al-Qassam Brigades, on November 14, 2012, sparking the second war on Gaza since its de facto liberation in 2007. Unlike previous conflicts, this war occurred under an Egyptian regime that politically supported Gaza, amid heightened Arab public mobilization and weakened Egyptian state institutions. The precarious environment heightened fears that unchecked escalation could lead to widespread instability. Consequently, U.S. diplomacy moved swiftly to halt the conflict. A ceasefire agreement was reached within just one week, making it the shortest and least costly war on Gaza. The hostilities claimed 105 Palestinian lives, left approximately 1,000 wounded, and resulted in 4 Israeli deaths and 219 injuries.

The golden year abruptly ended with a bloody military coup that ousted Mohamed Morsi from power on July 3, 2013. The coup leader unleashed a brutal crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, echoing the harsh Nasserist campaigns of six decades prior. On August 14, 2013, around 1,000 Brotherhood members were killed in a single day in the infamous Rabaa Massacre, named after the square where it occurred.

In relation to Gaza, the new military regime treated Hamas and the Gaza Strip as primary adversaries, initiating unparalleled efforts to suppress and isolate them. This campaign began with tightening the blockade to its maximum level and virtually sealing the Rafah border crossing. It escalated with a vigorous military operation to obliterate the network of tunnels linking Palestinian Rafah with Egyptian Rafah—lifelines that had been expanded to circumvent the longstanding land blockade since the Mubarak era. The Egyptian military employed a range of destructive tactics, including detonations, flooding tunnels with saltwater or polluted water, and deploying toxic gases. The campaign even went so far as to demolish the Egyptian village of Rafah to sever all smuggling routes. Additionally, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's regime constructed a colossal steel wall, extending deep underground and towering above ground, to thwart future tunnel operations. For Gaza, the decade following the coup was characterized by unrelenting hardship and adversity.

Less than a year after the coup, Israel launched its third war on Gaza in 2014, which proved to be the most devastating of all prior conflicts. At that time, the Egyptian regime appeared as resolute as Israel, if not more so, in its efforts to crush Hamas. For the first time, the Rafah crossing was closed even to injured individuals in dire need of medical care unavailable in Gaza. Egypt's political and media stance fiercely aligned with Israel's offensive, marking an unprecedented collaboration.

Despite the challenges, the resistance delivered an unexpected blow during this war when its rockets reached Tel Aviv, Israel's economic and administrative heart. While the rockets' destructive

power was limited, they managed to disrupt Israel's economy, halting operations at airports, schools, and other essential infrastructure. The primary impact of these rockets was less military and more psychological and economic, delivering a message of resilience amid adversity.

This war, the most intense to date, was also the longest, lasting over fifty days. Israeli forces, following heavy bombardment, attempted a ground incursion but were met with fierce resistance and remarkable steadfastness from Gaza's defenders, thwarting their objectives. Mediators sought to broker a ceasefire, but the resistance firmly demanded the lifting of Gaza's blockade. Israel, unable to achieve its aims, resorted to indiscriminate destruction of residential buildings as a means of pressuring the resistance. Eventually, a ceasefire agreement was reached.

The war underscored the ineffectiveness of military action in resolving the Gaza issue, as the enclave continued to grow stronger and more resilient. In the aftermath, all parties shifted focus to political strategies, resulting in three distinct yet sometimes overlapping approaches for dealing with Gaza. These strategies were implemented either simultaneously or alternately:

1. **Maximizing the Blockade:** This strategy sought to tighten the blockade to its extreme, closing all possible smuggling routes. It also aimed to destabilize Gaza internally by leveraging Fatah operatives or enlisting ISIS affiliates for targeted assassinations, creating internal unrest and eroding public support for the resistance government.

2. **Controlled Relief:** This approach allowed limited easing of restrictions, including the entry of goods and freer movement, to provide Gaza with modest economic relief. The intent was to make these small gains valuable enough for the resistance to defend, while betting that Gaza's population, already on the brink, would collapse if even these minimal privileges were withdrawn.

3. **Disengagement and Marginalization:** This strategy treated Gaza as a troublesome enclave to be ignored, focusing instead on advancing the broader Zionist agenda. This included

expanding settlements, Judaizing Jerusalem, and planning the displacement of West Bank residents, effectively creating a practical separation between the Gaza issue and the larger Palestinian cause.

These strategies were enabled and amplified by the Egyptian regime, whose active and rigorous efforts sought to subjugate and humiliate Hamas. The Rafah crossing, Gaza's lifeline, was weaponized to tighten the noose on the resistance, further exacerbating the already dire conditions in the strip.

In response to the increasingly challenging situation stemming from a softer, non-confrontational policy, Hamas undertook several significant initiatives, with three key actions standing out:

1. **Pursuit of a Unity Government:** Hamas sought to reach an agreement with the Palestinian Authority to form a national unity government, offering to relinquish control over Gaza entirely. The movement displayed a clear willingness to make substantial concessions. However, the Palestinian Authority imposed an unfeasible condition: the full disarmament of Hamas.[1] This stipulation, viewed as a surrender, was unacceptable under any circumstances. Consequently, efforts to establish a unity government failed, leaving Gaza under Hamas's administration—or more aptly, leaving Hamas burdened with the challenges of governance and management.

2. **Initiation of the "Marches of Return":** To address growing public discontent with its governance, Hamas introduced the concept of the "Marches of Return." These marches aimed to

[1] During an interview with Egypt's CBC channel on October 2, 2017, Mahmoud Abbas stated that there would be no illegal weapons in Gaza and that he would not accept a replication of the Hezbollah model. This stance was echoed by the Director General of the Palestinian Police, Hazem Attallah, during a press briefing with foreign journalists in Ramallah on November 8, 2017, where he reiterated Abbas's position. On the other hand, Khalil al-Hayya, a member of Hamas's political bureau, held a press conference in Gaza on November 27, 2017, where he firmly declared that the weapons of the resistance are a red line, expressing concern over recent developments that, in his view, did not bode well.

redirect public frustration toward the Israeli occupation, revive global attention to the Palestinian cause, and counter attempts to marginalize Gaza and its inhabitants. The marches involved mass, peaceful demonstrations along the borders with Israeli-controlled areas, accompanied by various civilian-led, non-military efforts to breach these borders and disrupt the forces stationed there. Despite limited international media and political attention to Gaza's plight, the marches successfully rekindled some awareness of the Palestinian struggle and channeled public anger toward the occupier, identified as the root cause of the crisis.

3. **Reviving Resistance in the West Bank:** Hamas focused on revitalizing resistance efforts in the West Bank, aiming to rebuild and reactivate its network of resistance cells. The region had become heavily controlled, first by Israeli security forces and then by the Palestinian Authority. Beginning in 2006, the U.S. identified groups within the Palestinian Authority for training in Jordan under the leadership of an American general, Keith Dayton, whose name became synonymous with this initiative. These forces were designed to be the Palestinian Authority's uncompromising enforcement arm, deeply complicit in undermining resistance. Unlike the era of Yasser Arafat, when some members of the Authority occasionally turned a blind eye to resistance activities or offered limited support during the collapse of peace talks and the eruption of the Intifada, Dayton's program sought to eliminate such exceptions.

Dayton and his successors successfully trained and deployed operatives who became notorious for their collaboration and betrayal,[1] acting as enforcers for the Palestinian Authority. These forces were often more oppressive to the Palestinian population in the West Bank than the Israeli occupation itself, systematically dismantling resistance networks and destroying the infrastructure of resistance efforts.

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[1] See Condoleezza Rice, p.652; Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, p.346. Gates is former U.S. Secretary of Defense and Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Amidst this suffocating climate, a handful of individuals emerged as martyrs, carrying out stabbing or shooting attacks. While some managed to kill or injure their targets, others failed. Their fate, however, was invariably sealed: they were either killed immediately, within hours of pursuit, or, at most, a few days later. The overwhelming security dominance of both the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian Authority made further successes seem nearly impossible.

Nevertheless, these persistent acts of defiance breathed new life into resistance in the West Bank, offering a flicker of revival after a prolonged period of suppression and stagnation.

Evaluations of these measures differ widely. Those analyzing them through the lens of available resources might regard them as achieving notable results. However, when judged against the broader objectives, they fall short. These efforts failed to significantly advance the Palestinian cause or reconnect Gaza's circumstances with the broader Palestinian struggle. Most importantly, the primary demand for Gaza—the lifting of the blockade—remains unfulfilled, with little indication of progress in the foreseeable future.

During this time, Hamas's security apparatus successfully neutralized attempts to incite unrest, execute targeted assassinations, and recruit operatives from Fatah and ISIS (Daesh), effectively derailing the plans of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

As a result, neither Israel achieved its strategic objectives in Gaza, nor did Hamas succeed in breaking the blockade, preventing deepening internal division, or countering efforts to isolate Gaza from the Palestinian cause. Confronted with this impasse, Hamas took the unprecedented step of initiating war, launching the *Sword of Jerusalem* campaign in 2021.

This was Hamas's first offensive war, prompted by escalating threats of Judaization, including the provocative Flag March planned by Israel. After a warning issued by Mohammed Deif, the Commander of the Qassam Brigades, was ignored by Israel,

Hamas began launching rockets. The conflict, lasting 11 days, resulted in the martyrdom of over 200 Palestinians, while Israel reported 13 fatalities.

The war conveyed a resounding message: Gaza could take the initiative to defend Al-Aqsa Mosque, and Jerusalem now had a metaphorical sword ready to be wielded from Gaza. This crucial assertion became the defining legacy of the *Sword of Jerusalem* battle.

Al-Aqsa Flood (Tūfān al-Aqsā)

Since the conclusion of the "Sword of Jerusalem" battle, Israel has persistently violated the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque, attempting to undermine the resistance's achievements from that conflict. These provocations included storming the mosque during Ramadan, assaulting worshippers, and imposing severe restrictions even during *tarāwīh* prayers. However, the resistance in Gaza responded with less intensity than expected, particularly given the heightened anticipation following "Sword of Jerusalem." Their reactions were largely limited to condemnation and threats, which Israel dismissed as it sought to solidify its absolute dominance over Al-Aqsa Mosque, acting with apparent impunity.

This led Israel to believe that Hamas had been effectively deterred and was now a "rational adversary" unlikely to engage in reckless actions. Buoyed by this perception, Israel redeployed several of its forces stationed near Gaza to bolster military and security operations in the West Bank.

This assumption was dramatically upended on the morning of Saturday, October 7, 2023. Hundreds of resistance fighters launched a large-scale offensive, breaching the heavily fortified Gaza perimeter amidst a massive rocket barrage targeting multiple areas in Israel. They penetrated dozens of settlements, killing over 1,000 Israelis, primarily military personnel, and overran the Gaza Division, seized its headquarters, and returned to Gaza with hundreds of Israeli captives. The timing of the assault coincided with a concert near the Gaza border, organized by Israeli

performance groups, inadvertently making attendees easy targets for capture.

According to sources close to the resistance, the operation was initially designed to last a single day. Yet, all its objectives were astonishingly achieved within just six hours. During this critical window, Israeli defense systems were completely paralyzed, unable to comprehend the scale or nature of the attack, which marked one of the most unprecedented and devastating assaults in Israel's history.

Despite its limited resources and the confines of a 17-year siege, the resistance in Gaza delivered a blow to Israel of unprecedented magnitude, one that even the combined Arab armies had never achieved. The attack inflicted the highest single-day death toll in Israel's history. What was even more astonishing was that Israel, with its advanced security apparatus monitoring Gaza around the clock, failed to detect any signs of such a large-scale operation. Its highly fortified security fence, equipped with multiple layers of sensors, safeguards, and surveillance, proved utterly ineffective—a mirage incapable of halting the offensive.

The resistance's primary objective was to secure a prisoner exchange that would lead to the release of all Palestinian detainees from Israeli prisons. However, the scale, intensity, and surprise of the attack provoked a fierce Israeli retaliation, which prompted swift intervention from Western nations, spearheaded by the United States. The U.S. President hurried to visit Israel, accompanied by high-ranking officials, including the Secretaries of Defense and State, as well as senior military and intelligence figures. The U.S. also deployed its two largest aircraft carriers to the Mediterranean, issuing a stark warning to deter any regional actors from joining the conflict. This reaction laid bare a striking reality: Israel, despite its self-image as a formidable power, could be struck and shaken by a small group of resistance fighters armed with light weaponry, operating within the constraints of a besieged and resource-starved environment.

It is premature to offer a definitive account of "Al-Aqsa Flood" as the events continue to unfold. Yet, what has transpired thus far represents a monumental chapter in Gaza's history. At the time of writing, the war has claimed the lives of more than 36,000 Gazans and left approximately 90,000 injured. This conflict has unmasked truths that were once obscured or ignored, leaving no room for doubt—except among those whose hearts and vision remain clouded by denial.

This war revealed the depth of brutality, bloodlust, and inhumanity demonstrated by the Zionists and their allies. They indiscriminately targeted hospitals, mosques, churches, shelters, tents housing displaced persons, humanitarian aid organizations, and even critical infrastructure such as water wells and power generators essential for water desalination and hospital operations. Field massacres were executed, victims were buried in mass graves, graves desecrated, and infants, including premature babies, were left to perish from hunger and the cold in hospital beds.

The conflict also underscored the unyielding support of Western nations, spearheaded by the United States, for Israel. This support is manifested in a relentless flow of weapons, ammunition, and missiles, alongside a network of experts, intelligence operatives, and surveillance systems deployed to track down prisoners and resistance leaders. The backing extended to coordinated political, media, and legal efforts on both international and domestic fronts. The brazenness of this support unveiled an unprecedented, overt complicity, revealing an unfiltered and grotesque bias.

Moreover, this war exposed the betrayal and moral collapse of specific Arab regimes, notably Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. These states actively shielded Israel and facilitated alternative maritime and land routes for its supplies, circumventing disruptions caused by Houthi strikes near Yemen's Bab al-Mandeb Strait. Their intentions became clear as they openly supported Israel's efforts to swiftly dismantle Hamas and the resistance in Gaza. Jordan reinforced robust border security measures to ensure

Israel's safety, while Egypt strictly regulated the Rafah crossing under Israeli directives, controlling the movement of people and goods. Even Egyptian nationals trapped in Gaza required Israeli consent to return, and Palestinians faced exorbitant fees, ranging from $5,000 to $10,000 per person, just to exit, epitomizing betrayal and exploitation.

This war also laid bare the paralysis and complicity of international institutions. The United Nations, along with its humanitarian, health, and legal arms, could do little beyond tallying casualties, producing reports, and issuing weak condemnations. Their operations on the ground were wholly subject to Israeli discretion, exposing the systemic failures of global governance and the unchecked dominance of Israel's agenda.

The helplessness of the Arab and Islamic World in aiding their brothers and extending support became painfully clear. They were forced to recognize how their actions were confined to the boundaries set by their regimes. Protests were only possible when permitted, and expressions on social media were allowed only within strict limits. Some were entirely silenced, unable to speak or write even on online platforms. This sobering reality laid bare the true extent of their power—or lack thereof—and the suffocating dominance these regimes exerted over them. Indeed, there is no power or might except through Allah, the Most High, the Most Great.

Insights from Palestine's Modern History

The history of Palestine is a profound and intricate tapestry, teeming with lessons and reflections. The deeper one explores it, the greater the insight into the world's dynamics over the past two centuries. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to assert that the Palestinian cause embodies the convergence of the world's most significant struggles, religious, historical, intellectual, political, and legal.

The following are the most critical points that demand focused consideration from this rich and multi-dimensional history.

Historical and Intellectual Insights

Historical narratives often remain fragmented and disjointed unless they are accompanied by the lessons and interpretations that weave them into a coherent whole. From these events, the following key insights emerge:

(1)

The struggle for Jerusalem is undeniably rooted in religion, with religious motivations serving as the most powerful and explicit driving forces. Throughout history, those who have fought for this sacred cause—whether Muslims, Christians, or Jews—have done so in the name of their faith. While some individual warriors may have sought worldly gain, and while rulers, kings, and emperors often pursued glory or territorial expansion, they invariably cloaked their ambitions in the mantle of religion and sanctity. They understood that it was only by invoking the profound religious significance of Jerusalem that they could rally fighters from their homes and inspire them to unleash their full potential in its defense.

Theodor Herzl initially considered various locations for establishing a Jewish homeland, but he soon recognized that only a return to Jerusalem would unite the Jewish people behind him. Similarly, during the Crusades, while some European kings may have dreamed of lands flowing with milk and honey, they could only rally armies by appealing to the cause of defending Christ's tomb. The same is true for Muslims; without Jerusalem's profound religious significance—as the first Qibla, the site of the Prophet's Night Journey, and his Ascension—the issue would not carry the same weight.

It seems divinely ordained that this truth be unmistakably clear. Palestine is neither among the most fertile lands nor abundant in rivers like Egypt or Iraq. It lacks the oil and mineral wealth of the Gulf states. Yet, it captivates hearts and commands more attention than Baghdad, Cairo, Riyadh, or other cities.

It is both absurd and treacherous for Jews to raise religious slogans while Muslims respond with secular rhetoric about historical land claims, human rights, or self-determination, arguments that fail to inspire action or carry weight in this ruthless world.

When the Jews seized Al-Aqsa Mosque, Moshe Dayan proclaimed, "If the Torah is with us, and we are the people of the Torah, then we are the rightful owners of the land of the Torah—the land of the priests and patriarchs in Jerusalem, Hebron, Jericho, and the surrounding areas. We will not leave. This is not mere political rhetoric; it is far more than that—it is the fulfillment of our ancestors' dream."[1] Similarly, Menachem Begin, in his memoirs, articulated his unwavering beliefs, "The signing of the partition agreement is null and void and does not bind the Jews. Jerusalem was and will remain our eternal capital, and the land of Israel will once again belong to its people—all of it, and forever."[2]

[1] Jerusalem Post, issue 10 August 1967.
[2] Menachem Begin, p.335.

Can such resolute rhetoric be countered with appeals to UN charters, Security Council resolutions, or International Court of Justice recommendations?

Religion provides something irreplaceable in this struggle—something that only faith can offer hope**.**

Eric Hoffer astutely noted that the Jews who were led to gas chambers and mass executions in Nazi Germany without resistance were the same people who later fought fiercely in Palestine. Many died without witnessing the fulfillment of their hopes, yet they fought relentlessly for the vision they carried in their hearts. In contrast, others surrendered and perished without defending the reality they already possessed.[1]

This hope is precisely what alarmed Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the pioneer of Israeli security doctrine. He understood that as long as a single spark of hope persisted among Arabs, Israel's future would remain uncertain. This hope, he realized, would fuel their resistance to the transformation of Palestine into Israel. Thus, he crafted a security strategy aimed at eradicating this hope entirely. His approach relied on overwhelming, swift, and inescapable deterrence, ensuring that Israel's power to punish and preempt would crush any chance of Arab resistance.

If Israel had confronted a non-Muslim population under similar circumstances, its security doctrine might have succeeded. However, its challenge lies in facing a population deeply rooted in a faith that guarantees ultimate victory—a belief in their eventual return to the mosque, the dismantling of the structures built by the Jews, and a battle where even nature, symbolized by trees and stones, joins their cause.

This spiritual resilience, driven by faith, is the only force capable of challenging Israel's security strategies and bridging the vast technological disparity. Even secular or atheist supporters of the Palestinian cause, motivated by nationalism, ideology, or

[1] Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, pp.118, 130 [Arabic Edition].

human rights, often find themselves compelled to invoke religious sentiment, as no other driver matches its effectiveness in sustaining this struggle.

(2)

History reveals that Jerusalem's destiny is rarely decided within its walls. Instead, it reflects the broader vitality of the Muslim world, particularly the power of neighboring capitals such as Cairo and Damascus. These cities significantly influence Jerusalem's status and condition.

The Companions of the Prophet exemplified this strategic approach. They prioritized Damascus over Jerusalem, despite the latter's sanctity and closer proximity, understanding that Byzantine power was anchored in Damascus. Once Damascus was conquered in Rajab 14 AH, Jerusalem's liberation in Rabi' al-Akhir 16 AH became straightforward, with only a year and a half separating these pivotal events.

Jerusalem did not fall to the Crusaders during the First Crusade until the Muslim world was fractured between two rival caliphates: the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad and the Shiite Ismaili Fatimid Caliphate in Cairo. This division created a geopolitical fault line in the Levant, with Damascus under the Seljuks, aligned with Baghdad, and Cairo under the Fatimids. This fragmentation enabled the Crusaders to seize Jerusalem in 492 AH/1099 CE.

Muslim efforts to reclaim Jerusalem succeeded only when unity between Egypt and the Levant was restored. This process began with Imad al-Din Zangi, advanced under his son Nur al-Din, and culminated with Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (Saladin). Once this unification was achieved, Jerusalem was liberated within three years, in Rajab 583 AH/1187 CE.

Periods of division between Egypt and the Levant, however, allowed the Crusaders to reoccupy Jerusalem. During the Ayyubid period, Sultan al-Kamil of Egypt allied with the Crusaders against his brother, Sultan al-Muʿazzam Isa of the Levant. In 624 AH (1229 CE), al-Kamil ceded Jerusalem to Frederick II in a peaceful

agreement. A subsequent Crusader occupation occurred in 641 AH/1244 CE, led by al-Nasir Dawud.

Jerusalem's security was restored when Egypt and the Levant were reunited under Najm al-Din Ayyub in 642 AH/1244 CE. For the next six centuries, under the Mamluks and later the Ottomans, Jerusalem remained secure as long as Egypt and the Levant were politically unified.

The city fell again in 1366 AH/1917 CE, following the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I, a collapse preceded by British occupation of Cairo in 1882 CE. This marked the beginning of a new era of foreign control over Jerusalem.

It is exceedingly difficult—perhaps impossible, as historical precedents illustrate—to expect Palestinians alone to shoulder the liberation of Jerusalem. The realities of limited manpower and resources constrain their capacity for a decisive confrontation with Zionist forces, particularly when those forces benefit from robust Western support. This backing is rooted in the alignment of Zionism with Western geopolitical interests and dominance over Islamic territories.

This acknowledgment does not diminish the extraordinary courage and resilience of the Palestinian people. They have performed near-miraculous feats through their steadfastness, struggle, and determination, keeping the cause alive despite enduring betrayals and isolation. Yet, the path to liberation requires recognizing this struggle as a collective responsibility of the entire Muslim Ummah, especially the pivotal nations of Egypt and the Levant.

(3)

A cornerstone of Theodor Herzl's success in advancing the vision of a "Jewish State" was his ability to harness the power of existing global forces, rather than attempting to establish a wholly independent entity to fulfill the dream. Herzl's Zionist Organization was instrumental in influencing key international

powers, ensuring that their resources and policies aligned with the Zionist agenda.

Herzl expended considerable effort to access decision-makers, utilizing various approaches: appealing to their interests, religious leanings, or through infiltration, threats, conspiracies, and even assassinations. His goal was clear: to engage existing powers, including the Ottomans, without presenting the Jews as rebels against the Caliphate or challenging the dominant forces of his era.

One of the primary reasons Islamic movements have struggled in the past century lies in their tendency to defy the principle of engaging with existing power structures and leveraging natural societal forces. Instead of adapting to the dynamics of prevailing systems, they often sought to construct isolated, artificially strong organizations intended to independently wage battles for governance or liberation. This approach frequently left them ill-equipped to navigate the inevitable challenges posed by entrenched structures, rendering them vulnerable to infiltration, division, and suppression.

Notably, Islamic movements achieved their most significant successes when they adapted to the prevailing systems and utilized existing societal frameworks to further their objectives. For example, some movements penetrated governance frameworks, such as the case in Türkiye, or influenced military institutions, as seen in Sudan. Others relied on tribal and clan networks within deeply rooted societal hierarchies, exemplified by their activities in Yemen.[1]

The Prophet Muhammad's approach exemplifies this principle. Rather than creating an isolated organization to consolidate power, he actively engaged with the prevailing societal

[1] Note that I said, "Islamic movements achieved their most significant successes," which does not imply outright success. A closer examination reveals that the setbacks in Yemen and Sudan were due to other factors. However, the level of influence and establishment Islamists reached in these cases far exceeded what they accomplished in other experiments that relied solely on the strength of their organizational structure.

structures of his time, leveraging their influence to strengthen and advance his mission. For example, he prioritized converting influential Meccan leaders, understanding the pivotal role they played in shaping their society. When these efforts were met with resistance, he reached out to the leaders of Ta'if, despite their harsh rejection. Undeterred, he turned to various tribes during the pilgrimage season, seeking their support and protection. Eventually, the embrace of Islam by the leaders of the Ansar provided the social and tribal foundation necessary for the Muslim community's strength and eventual establishment in Medina.

Herzl undoubtedly would have failed if he had relied solely on the independent efforts of a secret or public Jewish organization to establish a Jewish state.

No society is immune to internal disagreements, whether among individuals or groups. Progress depends on leaders' ability to manage and utilize these differences effectively. A major factor in Israel's success, especially during its early years, was the capacity of its leaders, such as Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion, to channel internal conflicts among the Zionists into productive outcomes. Ben-Gurion, for example, prioritized long-term national goals, often ignoring public opinion and media criticism, believing that Israel would be judged by its accomplishments rather than by contemporary approval. In contrast, Moshe Sharett emphasized Israel's image, carefully crafting its actions to align with public opinion and avoid controversy. Despite their differences, they collaborated for years, parting only after seven years of Israel's establishment.[1]

The Haganah, Israel's foundational military force, also saw splinter groups like Irgun and Lehi (Stern Group), which adopted more extreme methods. Ben-Gurion often condemned their actions, including the Deir Yassin massacre, yet managed to reintegrate many of their members into the Israeli army. Lehi's radicalism even led to overtures to Nazi Germany against the British and the assassination of UN envoy Count Folke

[1] Golda Meir, p.219.

Bernadotte. Although its members were briefly imprisoned, they were soon pardoned, with some receiving pensions or honors. Yitzhak Shamir, a former Lehi member, later became Prime Minister. To this day, Israeli leaders commemorate Lehi's founder, Avraham Stern, with annual tributes and a postage stamp in his memory.

The Zionist movement, like any other human endeavor, faced internal disagreements, some of which escalated into splits, revolts, and even assassinations.[1] Within its ranks, divergent visions emerged. Some members sought a Jewish return to Palestine within the framework of an existing state, aiming for coexistence with the Arab population,[2] akin to other multicultural contexts. This vision stood in contrast to the ambitions of others who advocated for a sweeping, replacement-driven return that would displace the native population and expand beyond Palestine into Transjordan. This expansionist tendency was epitomized by the party led by the influential theorist Ze'ev Jabotinsky.[3] As the architect of the doctrine of swift deterrence, a concept central to Israel's current security strategy, Jabotinsky opposed the Jewish Agency's acceptance of the then-current borders of Palestine.

The Quran sheds light on certain enduring characteristics within Jewish communities, stating,

﴿لَا يُقَٰتِلُونَكُمۡ جَمِيعًا إِلَّا فِي قُرٗى مُّحَصَّنَةٍ أَوۡ مِن وَرَآءِ جُدُرِۭۚ بَأۡسُهُم بَيۡنَهُمۡ شَدِيدٞۚ تَحۡسَبُهُمۡ جَمِيعٗا وَقُلُوبُهُمۡ شَتَّىٰۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمۡ قَوۡمٞ لَّا يَعۡقِلُونَ ١٤﴾

(Their hostility among themselves is severe. You think they are united, but their hearts are divided.) [Surat al-Hashr, 59:14]. This verse reflects the duality of presenting a united front despite underlying divisions. Historically, even when politically fragmented, Jewish groups prioritized collective solidarity, such as

[1] See for example, *The Autobiography of Ariel Sharon*, p.29-30.
[2] Roger Gaurudy, p.29 and beyond.
[3] A portion of Ze'ev Jabotinsky's speech before the 16th Zionist Congress in 1929 is referenced in *Palestine Documents Files,* vol.1, p.411.

ransoming Jewish prisoners of war, even from opposing factions. This is illustrated in another Quranic verse,

﴿ثُمَّ أَنتُمْ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنفُسَكُمْ وَتُخْرِجُونَ فَرِيقًا مِّنكُم مِّن دِيَٰرِهِمْ تَظَٰهَرُونَ عَلَيْهِم بِٱلْإِثْمِ وَٱلْعُدْوَٰنِ وَإِن يَأْتُوكُمْ أُسَٰرَىٰ تُفَٰدُوهُمْ وَهُوَ مُحَرَّمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ إِخْرَاجُهُمْ ۚ أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِبَعْضِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ ۚ فَمَا جَزَآءُ مَن يَفْعَلُ ذَٰلِكَ مِنكُمْ إِلَّا خِزْىٌ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَيَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰٓ أَشَدِّ ٱلْعَذَابِ ۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾﴾

(Then you are those [same ones who] kill one another and evict a party of your people from their homes, cooperating against them in sin and aggression. But if they come to you as captives, you ransom them, although their eviction was forbidden to you. So, do you believe in part of the Scripture and disbelieve in part? Then what is the recompense for those who do that among you except disgrace in worldly life; and on the Day of Resurrection, they will be sent back to the severest of punishment. And Allah is not unaware of what you do.) [Surat al-Baqarah, 2:85].

This combination of unity and internal discord has contributed to the preservation of Jewish identity and cohesion throughout their history, even during periods of dispersion and marginalization. Allah describes this state further,

﴿وَقَطَّعْنَٰهُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ أُمَمًا ۖ مِّنْهُمُ ٱلصَّٰلِحُونَ وَمِنْهُمْ دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ ۖ وَبَلَوْنَٰهُم بِٱلْحَسَنَٰتِ وَٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿١٦٨﴾﴾

(And We divided them throughout the earth into nations.) [Surat al-Aʿraf, 7:168].

During periods of despair, oppression, and weakness, the Jewish community experienced profound disillusionment, much like the feelings of hopelessness and self-doubt observed among some Muslims today. These sentiments were often accompanied by harsh self-criticism, and accusations of laziness, ineptitude, and passivity. Within the Jewish community, some mocked the notion of awaiting the Messiah or yearning for a return to Palestine, opting instead to explore alternative solutions. They proposed initiatives

for Jewish autonomy spearheaded by their leaders, in locations other than Palestine, which they perceived as unattainable at the time.

In 1882, Leon Pinsker articulated these views during a period when global efforts were coalescing to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Ironically, in the same year, Britain occupied Egypt, an event that brought the dream of reclaiming Palestine closer to realization than many had believed. Pinsker was far from apathetic—he was one of the founders of the "Lovers of Zion" societies, which played a pivotal role in laying the intellectual foundations for modern Zionism. Although his approach did not achieve its ultimate objective, it played a critical role in rekindling Jewish consciousness and redirecting focus toward Palestine.

I draw this parallel here to highlight the cyclical nature of such struggles. The patterns of self-doubt, demands for reform, and preference for practical solutions over lofty aspirations in parts of the Islamic world today reflect a broader sense of vulnerability. Yet, as history has shown, victory may be within reach, even when it feels most distant to those burdened by a defeated spirit. Just as historical Jewish movements—though initially unsuccessful—laid the vital groundwork for future successes, contemporary Islamic efforts, even if they falter, contribute indispensable steps toward greater goals.

Throughout history, many Jews made various predictions about the timing of their return to Palestine, most of which proved inaccurate. These forecasts, often based on calculations of years and days drawn from religious texts and traditions, reflect the mindset of those who, despite feeling powerless, cling to hope for eventual victory.

Even within the Zionist movement, some leaders found themselves compelled to collaborate with ruling regimes under challenging circumstances. A notable example is Alfred Nossig, a Zionist figure who negotiated with Talaat Pasha in 1918 over the status of Jews in Palestine. Later, Nossig shockingly aligned

himself with the Nazi regime, contributing to plans for the extermination of Jews in Europe.

This history serves as a reminder to the Muslim community: if a historically oppressed and condemned group could achieve what seemed like an impossible dream after 3,000 years, relying heavily on external alliances, then the Islamic nation has an even stronger foundation for hope. With divine promises of success and empowerment, and as the chosen community entrusted with the scripture after others failed to uphold it, Muslims have every reason to believe in their potential for triumph.

Some Conclusions on the International and Regional Context

If we examine the history of Palestine with the intent of understanding the nature of international and regional dynamics, a few critical observations emerge.

(1)

One key debate centers around the question of control: Do the Jews and Zionists dominate the West and its politics, or is the West the superior force, using the Jews and Zionists to further its colonial and imperial goals? This debate involves two main perspectives.

The first argues that Jews, through their secret organizations, financial influence, and deep penetration of media, arts, and culture, have managed to seize control of Western political affairs through means such as manipulation, dishonesty, and conspiracies. The second perspective holds that Western powers are neither naive nor foolish. Jews lived among them for centuries but remained marginalized and persecuted. The West, it is argued, deliberately empowered Zionists and facilitated the establishment of Israel, not out of submission but as a strategic tool for its colonial interests. Israel thus serves as a military outpost within Muslim lands, with Jews functioning as expendable human resources to save Western, Christian lives.

I lean toward the latter opinion: the West remains the dominant force, having utilized Zionists for its colonial goals[1] more than the Zionists used the West. The United States maintains the upper hand, with the capacity to regulate and control Israeli policies when it chooses.

While this is not the place for an exhaustive presentation of historical and political evidence, I find support for this view in the Quran. For instance, Allah says,

﴿إِذْ قَالَ ٱللَّهُ يَٰعِيسَىٰٓ إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ وَمُطَهِّرُكَ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَجَاعِلُ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِۖ﴾

([Remember] when Allah said, 'O Jesus, I will take you and raise you to Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve and make those who follow you superior to those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection.) [Surat Al-Imran 3:55]. Some interpreters understand this to mean that Christians and Romans will hold supremacy over those who disbelieved in Jesus (the Jews) until the end of times.[2] Another relevant verse states,

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[1] See Abd al-Wahab El-Messiri, vol.7, 347, vol.8, p.39.

[2] I reviewed various interpretations of the verse and found that some commentators explicitly state that the intended meaning is that Christians (and some specifically mention the Romans) are superior to the Jews. This is the opinion of scholars like Abd al-Rahman ibn Zayd ibn Aslam and others. The interpretive disagreements can be summarized as follows:
Some understood the "superiority" to be metaphorical, referring to superiority through arguments, evidence, and adherence to truth. However, this interpretation appears inconsistent with the context of the verse.
Others interpret it as literal worldly dominance, which seems more plausible and aligns better with the context. Among those who support this view, some argue that the ones achieving dominance are believers in Islam. Others suggest that the verse refers to those who believe in Jesus, including Muslims and Christians. This latter view is less likely because the speech is directed at Jesus before Muhammad's prophethood and the emergence of the Muslim community.
While the idea that Muslims, as followers of Jesus, might be the ones intended is understandable, history shows that Muslims have dominated Jews for centuries, except in the recent past. However, given the current situation where Jews have gained ascendancy over Muslims, the stronger interpretation points

﴿ضُرِبَتۡ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلذِّلَّةُ أَيۡنَ مَا ثُقِفُوٓاْ إِلَّا بِحَبۡلٖ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَحَبۡلٖ مِّنَ ٱلنَّاسِ﴾

(They have been put under humiliation wherever they are found, except when under a rope from Allah and a rope from the people.) [Al Imran 3:112]. This description of humiliation, along with the condition of relying on external support and assistance, negates the possibility of Jews being the ultimate dominant power in any era.

Irrespective of the ongoing debate and its resolution, the critical point is that the West will never abandon Israel or cease its support and protection, whether through diplomacy or warfare. This steadfast commitment encompasses evangelical Christians motivated by their faith, Christians who regard Jews as Christ-killers but consider both Jews and Muslims mutual adversaries, and secularists who view Israel as a strategic asset for Western colonial ambitions.[1]

This dynamic explains the West's extraordinary tolerance for Zionist actions that would be unacceptable from any other entity. For example, Zionist groups in the 1940s targeted British forces in Palestine with bombings, assassinations, and other violent acts, resulting in significant casualties among British soldiers and officers. Yet Britain ultimately handed over Palestine to them.[2] Similarly, Israeli spies have been repeatedly caught infiltrating U.S. intelligence, and American leaders often face public disrespect

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to Christians and the Romans being the dominant group, as proposed by Ibn Zayd and others.
For further reference, see:

- Al-Tabari's *Tafsir*, vol.6, p.463.
- Ibn Abi Hatim's *Tafsir Ibn Abi Hatim*, vol.2, p.662.
- Al-Thalabi's *Tafsir Al-Thalabi*, vol.3, p.83.
- Al-Suyuti's *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*, p. 74.
- *Encyclopedia of Tafsir by Narration*, vol.5, p.245-246.

[1] Roger Gaurudy, p.16.
[2] See for example, Regina Sharif, p.142; Rashid Khalidi, pp.79-80; Eugene Rogan, p.315 and beyond.

from Israeli politicians, yet such affronts are routinely ignored without consequence.[1]

Moreover, Israel's identity as a Jewish religious and ethnic state sharply contrasts with foundational Western principles such as secularism, liberal inclusivity, anti-racism, and the Westphalian framework of defined state borders. Israel not only disregards such boundaries but openly declares expansionist ambitions (*from the Nile to the Euphrates*). Despite this fundamental contradiction, the West remains Israel's ally while opposing groups like the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which aligns more closely with Western liberal ideals of a secular, inclusive state. Western officials may openly acknowledge this contradiction, either offering a justification—or omitting one altogether—for their actions or policies. Even overtly violent massacres have been defended as unavoidable necessities.[2]

Understanding this reveals the depth and complexity of the conflict. Israel is not merely a Zionist Jewish project but also a Western colonial crusade with religious and strategic underpinnings. This crusader-Zionist ideology, deeply entrenched within Western political, cultural, and economic elites, reflects a contemporary revival of medieval crusading ambitions.

This analysis dispels the prevalent misconception that Westerners only need to be enlightened about the justice of the Palestinian cause or that their lack of knowledge about the situation is the root of the issue. Many advocate for presenting the matter through frameworks such as human rights, self-determination, or adherence to international law, expecting this to stir Western empathy or action. In truth, a significant portion of

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[1] Hillary Clinton, pp.313-14; Robert Gates, pp.460, 469.

[2] See for example, Condoleezza Rice, pp.67-77, 328-29; Hillary Clinton, p.29 and beyond and compare with p.23; Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*, pp.132, 135 [Arabic edition]; George Tenet, p.111.

Western society fully comprehends and adheres to a belief system that views the land as divinely promised to the Jews, restored to them to displace the Arabs—described by some as an unfortunate historical anomaly, even "a stain on the face of civilization."[1] In this worldview, the Jews, bolstered by Western crusaders, are seen as fulfilling a divine mission to reclaim, develop, and possess this land, while expelling its so-called malign Arab occupants.

This understanding also sharpens our view of the conflict's complexity and the immense financial and human resources it demands. A lingering fallacy among some Palestinians, persisting even today, is the notion that they can achieve liberation independently. Inspired by isolated successes, some have even dreamt of extending their struggle to liberate other territories after freeing Palestine. Although these aspirations are often born of good intentions, they tend to overlook the sheer scale and ferocity of the conflict.

A comparison with Algeria's successful independence in 1962, which once inspired Palestinian resistance, underscores critical distinctions. France, debilitated by World War II, faced mounting international pressure from both the U.S. and the Soviet Union, ultimately relinquishing its colonial grip. In contrast, Israel enjoys unparalleled Western support. Algeria's larger population, expansive territory, and abundant resources significantly outweigh Palestine's capabilities. Moreover, Algeria benefited from a geopolitical environment that was at worst neutral, whereas Palestine's neighbors often act in collusion with its adversary, lending support to its opponent's efforts.

This sentiment has been echoed by numerous Western leaders, even those with opposing ideologies,[2] underscoring Israel's

[1] Regina Sharif, p.145, the speaker is U.S. Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, and the statement was made in June 1922.
[2] Notably, this statement was made by two fierce rivals among U.S. presidents: Trump and Biden.

importance as a strategic asset to the West. They assert that without Israel, the West would have had to bear immense financial and human costs to establish and maintain military bases in the Middle East. As a result, support for Zionism before the founding of Israel, and for Israel afterward, has remained a consistent policy among Western political factions, including competing groups like the Democrats and Republicans in the United States and the Liberals and Conservatives in Britain.

Netanyahu highlighted this dynamic in his memoirs, recalling a statement from an American congressman, "If we had an Israel in Afghanistan, we'd save ourselves a trillion dollars and have a reliable ally against the bad guys."[1] This perspective aligns with Herzl's vision, articulated over a century ago, of a Jewish state serving as "part of a defensive wall for Europe in Asia."[2] This connection has led some analysts to conclude that the broader global struggle finds its epicenter in the conflict over Palestine.[3]

However, this dynamic does not suggest that Jews or Zionists act as mere agents of Western powers. Instead, they are people with their own independent vision and agenda, actively working to strengthen their state, expand their influence, and further their reach within Western institutions. Nevertheless, the dynamic favors the West, as it retains the upper hand in this relationship. Disagreements between the two parties are ultimately managed within the framework of their shared strategic goals.

Building upon this conclusion, the following insight emerges:

If Israel serves as a central pillar of the Western project for dominance in the region, it follows logically, without requiring

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[1] Netanyahu, *Bibi: My Story*, p.758 (p.574 in-print)

[2] Rashid al-Khalidi, p.23.

[3] Dr. Gamal Hamdan believes that the global conflict and the fate of imperialism hinge on the fate of the Third World, which, in turn, depends on the fate of the Arab world. Furthermore, the destiny of the Arab world is tied to the outcome of the struggle with Israel. See Gamal Hamdan, *The Strategy of Colonialism and Liberation*, p. 351.

exhaustive political or historical analysis, that the current Arab regimes are likewise components of this same project. Whether by directly safeguarding Western interests or prioritizing the security of Israel, the linchpin of this agenda, these regimes have played their roles accordingly.

Arab regimes were the first to recognize this imperative. Every contender for power has sought to demonstrate their ability to advance Western priorities, with a particular emphasis on securing Israel's position. Despite their sharp ideological and structural differences—be they monarchies or republics, socialist or capitalist, civilian or military—these regimes share a unifying commitment: the protection of Israel. Internal rivalries often compel factions to outdo one another in signaling their willingness to normalize ties with Israel and deepen engagement. Moreover, when the stability of any of these regimes—especially those in frontline states—is at risk, they commonly warn that their downfall would imperil Israel's security.

This sheds light on a critical reality: since Israel's inception, no Arab state has ever launched an offensive against it or devised a concrete strategy for the liberation of Palestine. Not out of religious solidarity, Arab pride, or even the pragmatic goal of mitigating a severe national security threat. This paradox persists despite these regimes frequently posturing as protectors of Islam, champions of Arab identity, or defenders of national sovereignty.

A candid acknowledgment of this reality came from Gamal Abdel Nasser, who, addressing the Palestinian National Council in Gaza, remarked, "Anyone who tells you they have a plan to liberate Palestine is lying. And if I were to claim I have a plan to liberate Palestine, I would be lying to you."[1]

These regimes not only failed to support those wishing to resist Israel but actively worked against them, pursuing, imprisoning,

[1] Ahmed Mansour, p.61; Ahmad Jibril, p.57.

torturing, and even killing resisters. This occurred consistently, in both wartime and peacetime. The conditions faced by those who fought for or attempted to fight for Palestine within these regimes' prisons were often so harrowing that they defy comprehension.

Furthermore, an examination of Palestine's history reveals a telling pattern: Palestinian resistance thrived only under weaker regimes. In contrast, stronger regimes strictly prohibited resistance activities within their borders. For example, while regimes like Egypt and Syria neither waged war for Palestine's liberation nor formulated plans to do so, weaker regimes such as Jordan and Lebanon temporarily allowed resistance to operate from their territories. However, when such resistance gained momentum, these regimes intervened to suppress it. This was evident in Jordan in 1970 and Lebanon in 1982, where Palestinian resistance was forcibly crushed or expelled. As one observer aptly summarized, "Every revolution born in Palestine was aborted in the Arab capitals."[1]

Key Insights on Resistance

If I were to advise those involved in the resistance, or if I believed they would read what I write, my primary focus would be to convey the following insights:

(1)

An examination of Palestine's history reveals that its decline coincided with the decline of major capitals like Cairo, Damascus, and Istanbul. Conversely, its periods of security, prosperity, and stability aligned with the strength and vitality of these cities. Similarly, Israel's establishment was a result of decisions made by powerful capitals such as London, Washington, and Moscow. It is indisputable that without sustained Western support, Israel would

[1] Salah Khalaf, pp.13, 65.

either collapse on its own or be easily defeated with minimal effort or resistance.

This observation calls for a reassessment of the current strategy of limiting resistance efforts to within Palestine itself. While this focus may have been understandable in a specific historical context, it was driven by assumptions that have since proven to be misguided—namely, the belief in the sincerity of Arab regimes toward the cause of Arab unity or even their own national interests.

The keys to liberating Jerusalem lie in Cairo, Amman, and Damascus. Transforming the regimes in these capitals could fundamentally alter the balance of the struggle. It is unrealistic to expect the liberation of Palestine to be achieved as long as these regimes remain in power.

Islamic movements have historically erred by withdrawing from direct engagement in armed conflict, instead adopting the notion of establishing an Islamic state as a prerequisite for liberating Palestine. This strategy, while not without rationale, resulted in significant missed opportunities. It also led to the migration of active members toward secular or nationalist resistance movements like Fatah, which believed liberation could precede the unification of Arab states.

This belief was not exclusive to Islamic movements but was also embraced by nationalist parties, which similarly held that Arab unity was a prerequisite for liberating Palestine. This divergence in strategy has shaped the trajectory of resistance efforts and highlights the complex interplay between regional politics and the struggle for liberation.

Yes, the Islamic movement recalibrated its strategy in the early 1980s, stepping into the liberation struggle rather than waiting for the establishment of an Islamic state. However, this does not invalidate the earlier argument that Palestinians alone cannot

achieve liberation. That point remains valid, but defensive jihad demands immediate effort and action, which in turn propels and brings closer to the establishment of an Islamic state.

Had the Islamic movement adhered rigidly to its original principle and not founded organizations like Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the current scenario could have been far bleaker. It is conceivable that we might now be facing an Israel that spans from the Nile to the Euphrates.

The movement's pivot away from passivity marked a significant shift. Despite the asymmetrical power, it engaged in the struggle and achieved results that were extraordinary given its limited resources. Still, it is essential to reflect on the nationalist movement, particularly Fatah, which initially believed that liberation could be accomplished independently, inspired by Algeria's example. This notion was eventually abandoned.

Through its experiences, Fatah recognized Arab regimes as genuine impediments to liberation. Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad) famously remarked that Palestinian resistance posed a greater threat to Arab regimes than to Israel itself. He illustrated this with an analogy: imagine someone shaking an orange tree to get tis fruit, but in doing so, he causes the other rotten oranges to fall first. In this analogy, the desired fruit is Israel, while the rotten fruits are the Arab regimes, destined to collapse before Israel.[1]

(2)

Achieving power is an unavoidable necessity, whether through elections or other means, in Palestine and across Arab and Islamic capitals.

Initially, resistance movements, including most Islamic groups, operated as either militant or missionary organizations. However, when Hamas entered the 2006 elections, it made a pivotal decision.

[1] Salah Khalaf, p.6.

Had it not participated, Mahmoud Abbas might have dismantled the Palestinian cause, neutralizing these movements under the pretext of legal authority supported by regional and global powers. Instead, by entering the political arena, Hamas obstructed attempts to eliminate the cause and defended itself against betrayal, ultimately securing autonomy in Gaza. This autonomy turned Gaza into a resilient bastion of resistance, despite its harsh conditions.

Elections today are a recognized path to legitimacy, particularly when conducted transparently. This legitimacy is paramount. Any Islamic or resistance group failing to pursue or create pathways to power risks its demise in the short or medium term. Movements that remain steadfast to their principles—though rare—may still decline due to internal weakening or eventual submission to dominant forces under duress or temptation.

The distinction between Gaza and the West Bank underscores this point. In Gaza, Islamic leadership has achieved significant advancements in missile development and territorial defense. Meanwhile, resistance in the West Bank is reduced to individual acts like stabbings or vehicular attacks, often ending in the perpetrator's death.

Similarly, comparing Mohamed Morsi's brief but impactful tenure in Egypt with Mubarak before him and Sisi after him highlights the disparity. Even a fragile Islamic government achieved far more meaningful results than any authoritarian regime.

(3)

Undoubtedly, one deep-rooted issue that has impacted the trajectory of Palestinian resistance since the British occupation is the internal divisions among Palestinian leadership. These divisions, which the occupation worked to exacerbate, were further fueled by Arab regimes. There is no question that these

disagreements have drained significant time, energy, and resources. However, we must also recognize that true progress in the Palestinian cause only materialized when Gaza achieved military resolution and freed itself from the Palestinian Authority, which had acted as another treacherous force undermining the resistance. In fact, the Palestinian Authority, with its local knowledge, experience, and nature, was able to achieve what even the Israeli occupation could not.

For any resistance movement, one of the most perilous challenges is balancing two conflicting priorities: unity of purpose, or at least the effective management and containment of internal divisions, and the fight against collaborators and the treacherous projects masked by these divisions. Striking a balance between these often requires flexibility and swift, situational decisions rather than rigid principles.

One criticism of Hamas, however, is that it has consistently adopted a strategy of silent endurance, absorbing the crimes committed by Fatah. Even the blessed military resolution in Gaza was a tactical, battlefield decision, not a political one. To this day, the approach towards Fatah and the Palestinian Authority remains one of passive coexistence, which I believe has missed numerous opportunities to delegitimize this authority, expose its weaknesses, and, at times, confront it in the West Bank.

The Palestinian Authority and its allies, including those who hide behind affiliations with Fatah, have reaped significant benefits from this approach. However, they have shown no hesitation in tracking down, killing, and torturing resistance fighters, exposing their most reprehensible behaviors. This was particularly evident during the ongoing "Flood of Al-Aqsa" battle, which has persisted for nine months as of the time of writing.

The same strategy that applies to dealings with Fatah also applies to interactions with Arab regimes. Adopting a policy of avoiding antagonism with these regimes and steering clear of their

internal conflicts has helped the movement avoid many problems, taking lessons from Fatah and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. However, it is essential to recognize that such a policy requires flexibility and cannot rigidly stick to a single course of action. Adherence to one fixed approach has caused missed opportunities, especially during the Arab Spring.

Given that Arab regimes are consistently opposed to Hamas and other resistance movements and are disconnected from nationalistic principles or national security concerns, the situation naturally raises the need for action to remove these regimes. Such a policy might make sense if these regimes were genuinely nationalistic, but the reality proves they are not. Therefore, maintaining a stance of avoiding antagonism, appeasing these regimes, and neglecting opportunities to challenge them would be a serious historical error for the Palestinian resistance.

It is crucial to emphasize that the approach toward the PA and Arab regimes should be flexible, with an emphasis on seizing opportunities, rather than a rigid policy that treats internal struggles as off-limits or considers opposition to Arab regimes as a deviation from the overall strategy.

One crucial observation when examining the history of Palestinian resistance is that the organizations that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s were modern, or even modernist, in nature. These were hierarchical structures that disregarded traditional social bonds such as family, tribe, or community. This shift can be traced to two primary factors: first, the social upheaval within Palestinian society, particularly in the refugee camps where these organizations were established, which altered its social fabric; and second, the negative view these new leaders held towards the resistance strategies of the 1930s and 1940s. They viewed that form of resistance, which was largely based on the concept of *faẓah*—a spontaneous, grassroots mobilization to assist those in need—as disorganized and short-term, lacking long-term planning or

centralized leadership. From their perspective, this kind of mobilization was one of the factors that contributed to the Nakba and needed to be avoided.

This reflection leads to another critical issue that contributed to the successive failures in Palestine: the exclusion of the people from active participation in the struggle. This issue has several facets, including:

1. **The nature of the modern state**: The modern state's culture and system have a pervasive influence, even on resistance leaders, shaping their view of the struggle as one reliant on a well-organized, armed military with specialized branches, which excludes popular participation. In fact, there is often a reluctance to involve the people, as the military sees popular resistance as a burden rather than a resource in the fight.

2. **The nature of modern weaponry**: Modern warfare is no longer about basic weapons like swords, spears, or arrows. Even the simplest arms—such as rifles, pistols, and shells—are the result of a complex production process. This issue is directly linked to the nature of the modern state, where the state's structure and its military affect the production of weapons. The result has been harsh: we are a nation not lacking in fighters, but one in which fighters often cannot access the necessary weapons and ammunition. This shortage was a major factor in the Nakba. The occupier and its allied systems deliberately denied Palestinians access to arms, and those who did not die in battle were forced to flee due to the overwhelming superiority of the Jewish military arsenal.

3. **Technological and military superiority**: The overwhelming technological and military advantage possessed by the Zionist enemy and its Western supporters often renders bravery, courage, and even large numbers of fighters ineffective.

4. The situation is compounded when our forces are fragmented into factions that lack cohesion, formality, and heavy

weaponry, while the enemy fields a highly equipped, technologically advanced army, continuously supported from behind.

These factors, among others, force us to rethink the approach of an "armed people"—one where we seek to involve as many people as possible in the struggle, equip them with whatever weapons we can, and provide resources within the constraints of the environment available to us.

This task demands relentless perseverance paired with creativity and innovation. It focuses on designing weapons that can be locally manufactured in large quantities, enabling widespread arming of the populace. Innovative minds have already proposed numerous ideas addressing this challenge.

The central question is: How can natural resources and civilian tools be transformed into weapons of resistance? This requires engineers, technicians, and inventors to channel their expertise toward practical solutions.

Equally crucial is the question: How can a deterrent weapon be developed? If producing or importing anti-aircraft systems proves unattainable, addressing aerial bombardments becomes critical. For over a century, airstrikes have posed the greatest challenge in regional conflicts. Neutralizing this threat would drastically alter battle outcomes and potentially rewrite history. If countering airpower directly is not feasible, could resistance forces innovate within their means?

While concerns about an armed populace and the availability of weapons are understandable, history shows that a well-armed population is difficult, if not impossible, to subjugate. Disarming communities has often been occupiers' first step in exerting control. Many of the region's greatest setbacks stemmed from stripping its people of weapons, leaving them vulnerable to superior forces.

Moreover, widespread armament can foster balanced social dynamics—among societal factions, between citizens and authorities, and between populations and occupiers. Armed communities tend to experience lower crime rates compared to disarmed ones, where unchecked criminal elements dominate. The imbalance becomes even more dire when those enforcing laws are themselves corrupt or oppressive.

An armed population also develops a stronger sense of dignity and resilience, fostering courage and greater willingness to resist occupation. It creates a robust base for popular resistance, offering steadfast support to organized movements.

While fears concerning these matters are natural, they are not insurmountable. Organizing a group of "lions" into an army is far from impossible—what is truly futile is attempting to turn sheep or chickens into soldiers!

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